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Luck And Luck

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F-HAUNTED Boy

HA! HA!

Ha! Ha! Ha!

KEN DAGGETT

"THIS IS A RIOT!"

"ROUND AND ROUND"

No 727

MAY 8th 1912

5 Cents.

PLUCK AND LUCK

A HAUNTED BOY OR THE MAD-HOUSE MYSTERY
AND OTHER STORIES

By Allan Arnold



The sick woman in the bed covered her face with her hands to shut out the sight of the struggle. There came a crash as the lock was burst open. In rushed Bill and Hank, two of the keepers.

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PLUCK AND LUCK

Stories of Adventure

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A HAUNTED BOY

OR,

THE MADHOUSE MYSTERY

By ALLAN ARNOLD

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOOLBOY'S HISTORY.

It was midday on the 10th of May, 18—, when the train from Albany came thundering into the depot at Irvingdale-on-the-Hudson, and a fine, handsome-looking boy alighted.

He was apparently about sixteen years of age, attired in a neat suit of clothing, and carried a small valise and an umbrella. His dark-brown eyes swept a rapid glance around at the surroundings of the pretty, but sleepy-looking depot, and the scattered village beyond, with a curious look of expectancy. The village was charmingly located on the slope that ran down to the placid river's edge, most of the houses being handsome summer residences, and but few stores to be seen. On a rock eminence stood a large, gray stone building, inclosed by a high plank fence, of great circumference, at the northern suburb, while here and there at the middle of Irvingdale arose cupolas, church steeples and high, green foliaged trees and shrubbery.

The boy had hardly taken in this view when he heard a loud noise proceeding from the road in back of the depot, the shout of a man, the scream of a woman, the pounding of horses' hoofs, and the rapid rumble of wagon wheels.

Glancing through the depot windows, he was startled to see a buggy containing a lady and gentleman come rushing down the road, the horse wild and unmanageable from being frightened at the puffing locomotive that just then went roaring

by. The gentleman had lost all control over the beast, and if it plunged along in a direct line, it was evident that horse, man and woman, would go off the end of the dock where the road terminated, and plunge into the river!

As if to make matters worse, the carriage wheels jolting the stone, flung the man out, the reins flashed from his hands, and over the dashboard, fell upon the frightened horse's back, and the helpless woman could only cling to her seat and wait the result.

"Runaway!" muttered the boy, dropping his valise and umbrella. "The beast may kill that lady unless it is checked. I'll stop it."

In a flash he darted out in the middle of the road, and as the horse was almost on the point of trampling him down, he sprang up, caught the check-line on either side of its head, and with his legs up around the shaft, out of the way of the hoofs, and hung on.

He brought the horse to a pause—conquered—within a few feet of the dock, released it, and cried out cheerily to the distressed lady:

"Are you are, madam, safe and sound, thank heaven!" The woman wore a crape veil over her face, and instead of answering, she burst into tears, with the realization that her husband was over.

Then the gentleman approached, brushing the dust off

his clothing, looking all mussed up, and said, in hasty tones:

"Brave boy, by Jove! How can I thank you enough?"

"Oh, I am glad to have been of service, sir," replied the lad.

He was uninjured, and glanced at the gentleman.

Truth to tell, he was unprepossessed by the man's looks, though.

He was about forty years of age, dressed in black, wore a high silk hat, was short, wiry and slender, and had a clean-shaven face.

Rather a professional-looking personage, the boy surmised, and his white necktie would have aroused the belief that he was a minister, were it not for the sinister look of his face.

The lady's features were hidden under her veil, and the boy noticed that she was a middle-sized woman, plainly dressed in black.

Then his gaze returned to the restless look in the roving yellow eyes of the man, as he doffed his hat and showed a head bald on top, with just a fringe of black hair around his cranium.

"You are modest," said the man, bending a sharp look at the boy out of his singular-looking eyes, for they were utterly devoid of lashes and eyebrows, making his big nose look much longer. "My name is Dr. Caleb Crane," he continued, "and I see you are a stranger here. I have charge of the large, private insane asylum up there."

He pointed at the gray stone building upon the bluff, and the boy replied:

"Yes, I am a stranger here, and I am glad to know you, sir."

"Do you intend to remain at Irvingdale?"

"I do. I was born here, sir, but have been absent since I was five years of age. I have just returned from Albany, where I have been at college ever since, for my mother sent for me."

To the boy's surprise, he saw an expression of eager interest appear upon the man's face, and the woman bent suddenly forward in the buggy, as if intensely anxious over something.

"You don't say!" said Dr. Crane. "And your name?"

"My name is Ruric Gruesome."

An exclamation burst involuntarily from the lips of both the man and the woman, increasing the boy's surprise, and he saw them both start convulsively, recoil from him, and then recover.

The physician was the first to speak, having regained his faculties.

"I know your mother," said he, with an effort. "She is a patient of mine, whom I have been attending for a week past."

"Indeed!" said the boy. "I did not know she was ill."

A peculiar glance darted from Dr. Crane's yellow eyes.

He tapped his forehead significantly and replied:

"I feel sorry for you. She is slightly affected here."

"What—crazy?"

"No; but in a singular state from neuralgia. Nothing more. It sometimes gets serious, but she will be herself in a day or two."

"I have not seen her in eleven years," said Ruric, "but in the interval she has frequently written to me and never mentioned sickness."

"Of course not. Why should she, by Jove? Eleven years absent? And I suppose your father is dead, eh?"

"Ah, that is something I do not know, sir. I don't remember ever having seen him. My mother once wrote me, though, that he and she quarreled, parted—he went to sea and she stayed here. He wanted to get possession of me, I believe, and to frustrate that design she sent me away secretly to the school where I have been reared and educated, and there I have remained ever since."

"A queer history, by Jove! So she sent for you at last, eh?"

"Yesterday, sir. Here I am now, and I don't know where she lives."

"Ha! ha! ha! How funny! Can't you find your own home? That's a singular position to be placed in. But I need hardly direct you, for here comes her man-of-all-work with a wagon, no doubt to fetch you home, so I'll bid you good-day, hoping you will call to see me soon, and thanking you again."

He bowed to the boy, got into the buggy without saying a word to the silent woman, and gathering up the reins of the now pacific horse, he darted a strange glance at Ruric and drove away.

The boy fairly shuddered.

That queer glance, those strange eyes, seemed to pierce him through.

"What a singular couple," he muttered. "It makes me think of being fascinated by a boa-constrictor to get in the range of that man's vision. Queer his wife said nothing. And stranger still, how strongly affected they were on hearing my name uttered. I never saw such violent agitation exhibited before."

He walked back to the depot, picked up his valise and umbrella just as the four-wheeled surrey paused near by, and a good-natured-looking man beckoned to him.

"Be you Master Ruric?" was the rustic's query.

"That's my name," replied the boy.

"Tho't so. Step in. Your mother sent me for you. I'm Dan what works for her, you know."

"Is the house far from here?" asked Ruric, taking a seat beside the other.

"Oh, no," was the reply, as Dan drove off. "Just beyond that hill a ways, in the cottage you can see there, amid those trees."

"A pretty place," observed the boy, glancing at the gabled-roofed structure, with its vine-covered walls, and small, gothic windows. "My mother is sick, Dr. Crane just told me?"

"Yes," nodded Dan, with a visible lengthening of his face at mention of the physician's name. "And instid of getting better, since he's been a-doctoring her she's worse, I think. I s'pose you know he's your uncle by marriage, don't you?"

"My uncle! Why, no! I didn't know I ever had an aunt," said Ruric, "for you know I've been away from home a good many years, and my correspondence with my mother has always been meagre, she never telling me anything about her family."

"Now don't you?" said Dan, opening his pale-blue eyes wide with surprise. "Well, it ain't strange though, after all, considering how long you've been gone. Besides, your mother ain't one to say much about her past, as it must have been a sad one."

"Then that must have been my aunt with the doctor?" asked Ruric.

"Her? No," replied Dan, shaking his yellow hair, dubiously. "She must be some one else. Your aunt died abroad, you know, when she ran away with the doctor, and married him against her parents' wishes. That was over a year ago, you know, and when he came back to the asylum again and took charge, why, he wore a widower's weeds, and never went nigh the old folks in New York, as they were dead set against him, always."

"Did my mother know all this?"

"Of course she did. She don't like Caleb Crane, either, but had to have him attend her, as he's the only doctor hereabouts. She and her sister Maud were bad friends before Maud's death, too, I'm told, for your mother did the same thing Maud Forrester did, and that was to marry a sailor chap, Godfrey Gruesome, your father, against her folks' wishes. Maud sided with the parents, but that was before she did the very same thing herself."

"Oh!" said Ruric, nodding. "What ailed my grandparents?"

"Well, it's said they were mighty rich and proud, and wanted their daughters to marry better than either a lunatic house-keeper or a sailor, and I believe they disowned their children on that account."

Your mother once quarreled with your father over it, as Julia Forrester was proud, and marked the distinction between herself and him. It cut Godfrey Gruesome, for he was a high-spirited man, and they separated. You know how he tried to get you. But your mother was too smart for him, and sent you away to the school you've been at ever since. Your father couldn't find you, so he left your mother, and went to sea, I believe, and that's the last ever seen or heard of him since. But the old folks relented, I'm told, when they found out what her husband did. On account of Maud doing the same thing, right on top of your mother being abandoned by her husband, why, they sent your mother so much money every month ever since, and that's how she's lived."

Ruric's whole history was disclosed to him now by the garrulous Dan, and by the time it ended they reached the cottage.

Entering, the boy was met by a servant, a dark-featured woman of forty, of French appearance, and telling her who he was, she smiled queerly at him and asked him to follow her upstairs.

Conducting him to a bed-chamber, she opened the door, told him his mother was inside, and then followed him in.

It was an ordinary bedroom, nicely furnished, and upon the bed lay a woman of about thirty-five, with her eyes closed.

Hearing him enter, she suddenly sprang to her feet, and the next moment she had Ruric clasped in her arms, and was shedding tears of joy over the boy, as she kissed him again and again, and commenced to question him about his past career.

CHAPTER II.

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK

Having told his mother his history, from the beginning of his college career, Ruric then explained what Dan told him of her life, to all of which the servant listened intently.

Mrs. Gruesome observed the woman after awhile, and exclaimed:

"Marie—you can leave the room!"

"Yes, madame," replied the woman, with a look of disgust.

She went out, closed the door, but out in the hall dropped down on her knees and pressed her ear against the keyhole.

"You were telling me all you learned, Ruric," said Mrs. Gruesome when they were alone, as she and the boy sat near the center-table, "and it is all true. Servants are prying and soon find out all about a person. I wanted you back from school as I was yearning to see you after all these years, and am satisfied that your father is dead, and cannot take you away from me now."

"And you have been sick, mother?"

"Yes. Ruric, I cannot understand it, my mind is strangely becoming affected, and at times within the past week I feel as if I was becoming actually mad! Queer sensations overwhelm me immediately after I finish my meals, and it seems to me that I lose my mind."

"That is very strange, mother."

"Well may you say so, my boy. But you cannot realize it. I lose all my consciousness, and it is hours before I recover from the spell of madness. Yet, how to account for it I do not know."

"You have no enemies who would try to poison you, have you?"

"What a wild notion! Why, no! Of course not. Who would want to poison me? Why should any one design such a thing wantonly? My death would not gratify a revenge, as I have no enemies, nor would it benefit any one in the way of gain. Yet every time I finish eating I am affected as I said."

"An', par dieu, so you shall be to ze end, my lady!" softly muttered the woman in the hall. "Ze powdair soon have ze deslair effect an' zen ve see eef you not become mad—mad—mad! Ah, eet ees ze ver' elevair vay zat ze doctair tell me—zat I poot ze stuff een your food. Ma foi, eet ees ze subtle vay!"

Marie had a small notebook in her hand and a pencil, and as the boy and his mother continued their conversation she rapidly inscribed all their dialogue in the book in shorthand.

Unaware that the spying servant was listening to all they said, ignorant of her sinister motives, and innocent of the idea that she was the authoress of Mrs. Gruesome's ailment (at the instigation of Dr. Caleb Crane), the boy and his mother went on with their conversation several hours longer, and at last separated, the woman to sleep, Ruric to go to his room.

Then on a pretext to her mistress, in order to get out of the house, Marie donned her bonnet and, leaving the cottage with her notebook in her pocket, she hurried away.

The sun was going down, and she selected the shady side of a road leading out of the village toward the madhouse.

Arrived at the plank fence iron gate, beside which stood a small lodge, the woman rang a bell-knob, a gong vented a clang, a rough-looking man emerged from the lodge, opened the gate, nodded surlily to her, and she sped up the broad, stony path, winding among the flower-beds, toward the building.

The building was octagonal in shape, vine-covered, two stories high, pierced by numberless windows, having a turreted roof, with a small tower at each angle and a broad main entrance door.

Marie Montmedy's small, beady, black eyes snapped as she mounted the steps, rang the bell, and was admitted by Dr. Crane himself.

"Ah, Frenchy, by Jove!" he ejaculated, upon seeing her.

"Monsieur, ze boy zat Mrs. Gruesome wrote for, he coam, sair," she panted.

"Yes, true—I know, by Jove! But come into the office, and give me the news, my faithful little servitor, and more gold shall be yours. I promised to liberally reward you for all the work you did for me."

The avaricious look on the French woman's face plainly told that gold was the god she worshiped, and to gain which she would not scruple at anything she was capable of doing.

She followed him into the office—a plain apartment near the front door—sat down near his desk, produced her book, and read off all she had written therein, with a charming foreign accent.

The doctor listened eagerly until she was through.

"Then I must work fast," said he, after pondering a moment.

"The boy is in the way, but can easily be disposed of for a time. Be in readiness to admit me in your house to-night after you hear the clock strike twelve."

"Monsieur shall find me een readiness," replied the girl.

The madhouse owner arose, opened a bookcase filled with bottles and jars, all numbered and labeled, and filled a small vial.

Handing it to the woman, he said, in deliberate tones:

"This must be the last dose. Give the woman only four drops in her food—no more—remember four drops. Six would kill her. You can give the boy two drops—two drops in his, at the same time."

The woman took the vial and put it in her pocket.

"Zere ees no dangair of ze death?" she asked.

"Not if you do as I prescribe. The decoction is a mixture of neurotic and delirant poison of my own invention. The ingredients all act on the brain. The neurotic is a little chloral hydrate—only fifteen grains—it produces excitement, delirium and lividity—thirty grains would kill. It is an anesthetic. There is also an inebriant—the Levant nut of the East Indies, the juice of which produces complete loss of voluntary power, with consciousness of passing events. Next, there is atropa belladonna, or Deadly Night Shade, which arouses double vision, giddiness, dilated eyes, delirium, a disposition to laugh and talk wildly, fanciful delusions, a rapid flow of ideas, and some difficulty in walking. Last, but not least, is an atom of Dhatoora, an Indian plant, the seeds of which, mixed with food arouse noisy delusions, all kinds of foolish notions and antics, and in conjunction with the other preparations make a veritable maniac of the person who takes it."

Marie silently nodded, a look of indescribable sickness on her face, as she imagined the effect of what she was commissioned to do.

Caleb Crane next drew a wallet from his pocket.

Extracting fifty dollars, he handed it to the woman, and continued:

"And here, by Jove, is the medicine that will make the other effective. Now go, Frenchy, go, and let my work be well done, my woman."

"An' ven ve feenish, monsieur?" she asked, arising.

"I will pay you five thousand dollars, as I promised."

The woman then hurried out, and made her way to the gate the doctor watching her from the doorway with a cynical smile on his smooth-shaven face, and a queer look in his yellow eyes.

Marie then returned to the cottage, and prepared supper for Ruric and his mother, being careful when all was ready to drop no more than the stipulated quantity of Dr. Crane's devilish mixture in the food for her victims.

At seven o'clock the mother and soon partook of the repast in the dining-room, and as Mrs. Gruesome complained of feeling unwell, she left the boy on the piazza to go to her room.

Ruric was reading a book by the light that streamed out of the open parlor window, but within an hour he felt the effect of the subtle drug, and as drowsy as if chloroformed, from

consequence of the chloral hydrate (which, with an alkali, is actually converted into that powerful anesthetic), he laid aside his book, arose, and staggered, rather than walked, to the door.

"Why," he muttered, in choking tones, as he groped his way into the hall, "what—what ails—me? I—I feel—as if—I was strangling! My eyes—my eyes—they—they are bursting and—burning. How—strange—how—odd! C—c—can—I—I—b—b—be sick?"

He pressed his fevered hands to his throbbing temples and, reeling, he fell to the floor, at the foot of the stairs, unaware that Marie had darted out of the parlor, in which she had been sitting, watching him like a lynx, and bent over to lift him up.

Her black eyes seemed to glow like balls of fire in the gloom of the hall, and her breath came and went in short gasps as she muttered:

"Eet ces ovaïrpowair heem at last! Sacre! Now, Monsieur Rureek, upstairs veez you, sair, an' to bed—to bed!"

Just then there sounded a wild shriek in the upper part of the house, the thunderous beating of a chair against a door, and the voice of the boy's unfortunate mother, howling in frenzied accents:

"Mad! Mad! Mad! They have driven me to it at last! Ha! ha! ha! You have locked me in, you demon—you have locked me in—do you hear? I'll batter the door down if you do not liberate me! I'll smash it to fragments—fragments—fragments! Oh—ha! ha! ha! My brain is on fire! My veins are burning lava streams! I—oh, what is the matter? Why do I rave this way? This is strange!"

A low sob followed in plaintive accents, and the noise ceased.

But those shrieking tones aroused the boy momentarily from his stupor.

"My mother!" he cried, wildly, as the voice seared in on his brain, and he bounded to his feet glaring at Marie. "She is sick!"

And with that he rushed upstairs.

But he fell upon the upper landing again, overcome by the drug.

A heartless, sibilant laugh pealed from the French woman's lips, as a low, wailing, moaning sound emanated from Mrs. Gruesome's room, and stooping over Ruric, whom she followed, she dragged him into the apartment next to his mother's, which was set aside for him, hauled him up on the bed, locked the door on the outside and went downstairs.

Several hours passed by, the boy lying like a log on the bed, his breath labored and stertorous, his fingers clutching at the covers, his swollen eyes half open, and his face fairly scarlet.

During that time the woman in the next room was terribly affected, at one moment moaning, whining and sobbing, the next laughing boisterously, then flying into an intense fit of ungovernable fury.

She raged around the room like a wild beast, smashing everything in her way, hooting, snarling, singing hilariously, and gnashing her teeth.

The clock in the boy's room was striking the hour of twelve, when a more violent paroxysm from the maddened woman aroused him partially, and he heard her shrieking and praying for help.

Ruric was not certain but what his fancy was playing him a trick as he was half dazed yet, his ears humming, and his vision seemed to be strangely impaired.

Mechanically arising and seeing a door communicating with his mother's room standing ajar, he crept over to it and peered in.

What next happened to him seemed a dreadful nightmare.

He imagined he saw his mother's room in a terrible state of disorder, the furniture smashed and overturned, tumbled about in wild confusion, and everything broken and spoiled.

He pressed his hands at his temples, his eyes fairly bursting from his head, his face roasting hot, his breath fetid.

Then there arose a vision before his eyes that seemed to be too terrible to be true, yet it certainly must have been; but he could not clearly see or think, nor could he utter a word.

In the middle of the room was his mother, struggling with savage ferocity to get away from Dr. Caleb Crane, her eyes blazing like live coals, and her face distorted into a most hideous expression of rage.

She was howling and fighting with supernatural strength, and seemed to be endowed with the courage and fortitude of an animal.

The physician was swearing at her, and endeavoring to get a pair of handcuffs linked on her wrists behind her back.

But her violence seemed to frustrate his design.

The scene became blurred, dim and shadowy then to Ruric.

He tried to cry out, but his throat was dry, contracted and sore, his lips were parched with the fires of fever, and respiration was inadequate.

When his vision returned, he looked in again.

There knelt his mother on her knees, her manacled hands clasped together and upheld to Caleb Crane, tears streaming down her cheeks and the man holding a chair over her head, menacingly.

Ruric saw the chair descend with a brutal crash, he heard a pitiful moan, he saw the stricken woman sink down, and he heard the physician cry, in hoarse tones:

"She is senseless! Marie—quick! Come here. Help me!"

Powerless to aid his mother by going to her rescue, he saw the French woman dart forward from an obscure corner, and with an anguish of heart beyond description he saw them lift and carry his mother away.

Held by invisible chains on his muscles, he could not move, but remained on his knees like some stunned, stricken beast.

Then a revulsion took place.

His mind burst through the clouds of the drug, nature being strained to its highest tension, a hoarse cry burst from his lips, he bounded to his feet, and running, tripping, staggering and blindly groping his way, he passed through that dreadful room, out in the hall, and fell headlong down the stairs.

But the shock only brightened his befogged intellect; he got up bruised and sore, rushed to the door and saw the woman and the doctor getting in a coach with his screaming, gabbling mother, and then the vehicle rolled away.

Maddened, nerved up, desperate, he rushed after it.

Down the dusty road it sped, the boy in its wake, running as fast as he could go, until at last it reached the asylum gate.

It passed through, and when he reached the gate he saw them carry his mother out and into the great, grim abode of horror.

He beat at the closed iron gate, he shrieked aloud, and at last, utterly exhausted, he sank down upon the ground, insensible.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE AWAKENING.

The moment the dark portals of the madhouse closed behind the figures of Dr. Crane and Marie Montmedy, bearing in the figure of the screaming woman, who had recovered from the blow dealt her by the physician, they both looked intensely relieved.

The madhouse keeper was met by several men in the hall, whom he employed about the establishment.

A few words sent them away again, however, and the maddened woman was forcibly carried through the broad, echoing hall to the floor above, and then brought along a long corridor.

A dozen iron-barred cells opened on either side, out of which glared a maniac in each one, their fingers clutching the bars, their vicious eyes gleaming balefully, their horrible faces in various expressions of different emotions, and their wild yells and mutterings ringing out with blood-curdling intonations.

Some shoved their claw-like hands out and tried to grasp the clothing of the girl, the woman, and the doctor, as they hurried by toward a larger room at the end of the passage.

An ignited lamp stood on the table, a box of matches, a pen, an ink bottle and paper beside it, and a chair was drawn up at one side.

Passing inside, they saw a bed standing in one corner, the door was closed, and the maniac woman stood on her feet.

She uttered a smothered cry, as soon as she was free, and groveling back against the wall, she crouched there furtively glaring at her captors, her face swollen and inflamed.

The doctor laughed, and drew a paper from his pocket.

"Did you ever see medicine work better, Marie?" he asked.

"Eet ees wonderful, sair. Van would sink zat she be ze crazy voman, shure, sair, an' no meesteek of zat."

"I want her to sign this paper, by Jove, and you to witness it."

"Vot ze papair she say?" asked Marie, curiously.

"Ah! That is my secret, Marie; that is my secret."

A look of disappointed curiosity crossed the French woman's face.

"You trust me viz so moech—vy not all?" she asked.

"Because, Frenchy, it would put me in your power, by Jove, and that does not suit my fancy at all, my woman," said the doctor, with a nasty leer, wrinkling the corners of his mouth and queer yellow eyes. "All I now need is your signature as

witness that that woman signed the document, and then you may go home."

"Go 'ome? No—no! Not to-night after vot pass," said a woman, with a shudder of horror. "Ze boy may do me som harm."

"As you please. You may sleep here in this room if you like."

Then he turned to the poor woman who was idiotically driveling, and in a coarse, brutal voice he exclaimed:

"Come here—you! D'you hear me! Come here!"

Whining and moaning the poor unfortunate crept up to him with a scared look upon her red face, and he thrust the pen in her hand and said to her as he opened out the paper:

"Sit down in that chair and affix your name to this paper! You know what you are doing! Now if you don't obey me I will give you such a beating you can't stand up!"

The woman only kept a fixed, vacant, stupid stare on his face, though, and his experience told him she was incapable. Coaxing, pleading, threatening and cajoling were in vain.

Dr. Caleb Crane was not to be swerved from his purpose, though. So he seized her hand in his own, held the pen between her fingers and traced her name at the bottom of the paper.

Marie watched him intently.

"There," said he with a sigh when he finished, and pushed the woman off on the floor. "That is plain enough! Julia Gruesome. You saw her write it, and can swear to it, can't you, Frenchy? Of course you can, and, by jingo, it will pass as legal anywhere with the signatures of two witnesses. Now you sign it, too!"

He was careful, though, not to expose more of the paper to Marie's inquisitive gaze than the margin she was to sign.

The poor woman was lying prone upon the floor, where Crane flung her, when Marie signed the paper.

"That will do," said the physician, pocketing it. "And now to shear and lock this thing up in a cell so she can do no damage, as I must keep her dosed constantly on that medicine, and keep her here all the rest of her life!"

He seized a pair of scissors from the table, and falling on his knees beside the prostrate woman, he rapidly cut off all her luxuriant dark hair close to the scalp.

She did not say a word, nor offer the least resistance, and only moaned and moaned pitifully, until he suddenly seized her by the arms, and dragged her out into the hall toward a nearby cell, the door of which stood open.

Then she fought him like a tigress.

But he was accustomed to handling maniacs, and with a muttered threat to put her in a strait-jacket on the morrow, he thrust her in and slammed the door shut, after taking the handcuffs from her wrists.

The cell had a spring lock, and he did not observe that it did not catch in the groove entirely, as he walked away.

Returning to the other room he peered in and said:

"She is safe enough now, by Jove, Frenchy, so I'll leave you and retire, as I'm tired out fighting her. This is the room my dear departed wife used to occupy with me. It is noisy, my dear, but if you can stand the racket the incurables make, you'll sleep all right. There's no danger of any of them getting out, and you'll be as safe here in this Bedlam as you would be on an island in mid-ocean, so good-night."

Marie was perfectly satisfied with her quarters, as she had no desire to return to the cottage that night.

And pondering over the strange mystery enshrouding all these queer proceedings at the madhouse, she undressed herself and went to bed, where she soon fell asleep, forgetful of locking her door, she was so wrought up by the exciting events through which she had passed that night.

Despite the wild cries of the incurables, she slept soundly. Too soundly, in fact!

For, an hour later, her bedroom door was softly and cautiously pushed open, and Mrs. Gruesome's terrible face was thrust into the apartment, and her glance fell on the sleeping Marie.

Finding her cell-door open, she had stolen out, and Marie's room door being the first thing she saw, she had opened it.

Then she crept in, as softly as a cat, and donned Marie's dress and shawl.

On the table the lamp stood dimly burning, and an evil look of cunning treachery stole over the crazed woman's face as she saw the box of matches standing there beside it.

Like a shadow she glided up to the table, and picking up the matches, she began to light them one by one, and flung them, burning, all over the bed.

In a minute the bed-covers all caught aflame.

Recolling up against the door, the crazed woman seized

the knob with one hand, and shook the other at Marie, hissing:

"I owe all my trouble to you, thrice accursed, and my revenge will be to see you roast to death while you sleep. Ha! ha! ha!"

And as her demoniacal laugh pealed out in sibilant inflections, she softly opened the door, passed out in the corridor, and gliding to the other end, she opened a door in a transverse hall.

It was the doctor's sleeping apartment, and he was slumbering in bed, his clothing on a chair beside him.

The woman glided up to his coat, took the paper he forced her to sign from his pocket, but the chair fell with a crash, arousing him.

He jumped up, saw what happened, and rushed after the woman as she sped from the room with a loud laugh.

Opening a window in the hall, she climbed out, and went down the vines growing against the face of the building to the yard, before Crane could get anywhere near her, and with the paper in her possession, she vanished around the building in the yard.

* * * * *

When Ruric Gruesome recovered consciousness, he found himself lying in his bed at the cottage the next morning.

All traces of any adventure he might have had the night before were now gone, for he looked as well as ever.

Jumping up, he hastily drew on his pants.

"My mother! My poor, poor mother!" he moaned, as a look of unutterable woe crossed his face. "What has become of you? How came I here? Oh, heavens! why did all that happen?"

His mind was in a whirl of excitement.

"I must find her," he muttered, grimly. "I must get in that asylum, by force if necessary, and make those terrible wretches give her up—restore her shattered reason, and——"

"Ruric! Are you up yet, my boy?" interrupted a voice.

He started as if stricken a blow.

"Why, good heavens! that is my mother's voice!" he gasped.

The door opened and a lady dressed in black, with her long, dark hair neatly done up on her head, entered the room.

The boy cast but one glance at her; he uttered a gurgling cry, reeled back, his hair standing on end, his face blanched, his teeth chattering, and his eyes bulging out of his head.

"My mother!" he cried, hoarsely. "Alive! well! Oh, what does this mean?"

"Why, Ruric," said the lady, advancing with a sweet, gentle smile on her placid face, "what are you talking about? Are you sick?"

"Great heaven! are you a phantom? Am I sleeping yet?"

"Why, no, my son. I am over my little illness of last night. Marie has rung the breakfast bell, and Dan is waiting to drive us out afterward."

Ruric was almost paralyzed, and gasped, tremblingly:

"Are you sure you were not drugged—crazed—beaten—carried off by Marie and the doctor?"

"You must have been dreaming, Ruric. You slept uneasy all night, I know."

"Slept—uneasy? Oh, heavens! This is not reality. I am a haunted boy!"

And real, natural, and all right as everything now seemed, there was something terribly, fearfully strange in what had passed, for he had not been dreaming.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE STABLE.

In his bedroom, his mother standing before him, smiling, happy, and evidently no such maniac and sufferer as he thought he saw her the night before, Ruric Gruesome could hardly realize it was not some hideous dream and nightmare he passed through.

He remembered seeing his mother, resembling a maniac in her room, assaulted by both Marie and Dr. Caleb Crane, and the blow she received, the way she was carried away in the coach to the madhouse, and how he fell at the gate, unconscious.

Yet here she was, saying everything must be a dream, he had slept uneasy, Marie Montmedy had rung the breakfast bell, and that Dan was waiting to take them out driving afterwards!

It seemed all too good to be true.

The awful impression stamped on his mind, though, was so vivid that he could not believe he was dreaming, yet that he was haunted by the awful recollection was the real truth.

He felt as if he would go mad puzzling to solve the strange problem.

So he walked over to his mother, kissed her, and saw that she was alive, cheerful, uninjured, and not at all crazed.

His own head ached him some, and he felt a trifle sick at his stomach a few minutes later; but beyond that there was nothing wrong, and a glance in his mother's bedroom showed it to be neat, orderly, and not a thing disarranged or broken!

Yet he thought his crazed mother had smashed everything the night before, when he looked in there!

Nor was the lady's hair cut off!

Yet Doctor Crane had shorn the mad woman's head, and after setting fire to the bed, in which Marie laid slumbering in the madhouse, the crazed woman had climbed down the vines from the window to the yard, leaving the French woman to roast!

Ruric left the room with his mother, fearing he was getting crazy, and there was Marie in the dining-room, pert, dark, and so utterly indifferent that it seemed impossible she was as guilty as he imagined.

After breakfasting, Ruric and his mother got into the surrey and were driven around Irvingdale by the apparently simple-minded Dan.

All points of interest were pointed out by Mrs. Gruesome, the boy taking in everything, but preserving considerable reticence, as his past experience was preying upon his mind.

He told Mrs. Gruesome all he thought he witnessed.

She laughed at it as a mere dream.

On the way home again Ruric suddenly said:

"Dreams generally owe their origination to events, persons and places we have seen, the disordered imagination contorting those things, making the vividest impressions on our minds into grotesque ideas."

"Then," said his mother, "you see how you can account for yours."

"In what way do you mean, mother?"

"Didn't you meet Doctor Crane yesterday?"

"So I did. And you were sick last night, too."

"Then there are the links connecting your fancies while sleeping with the realism of natural order of things. But speaking of the doctor, I want to inform you that Dan made a huge mistake by saying I disliked him so heartily. He is my brother-in-law, you know, and consequently your uncle by marriage. Since Maud, my sister, died in France, and the doctor's return, he has been so assiduous in his attentions to me that I have finally concluded to—to—to——"

"To do what, mother?" asked Ruric anxiously.

His mother was stammering, confused, and had been blushing deeply.

"Well, Ruric, you know how your father ran away to sea deserting me eleven years ago? Well, since then I found I needed a helpmeet in life, and as Doctor Crane was so good and kind and yet gently persistent, and asked me to marry him, why, I have consented."

"What!" cried Ruric, aghast. "You—marry—that—man, mother?"

"Such is my intention, my son; see—here is my engagement ring."

She showed a fine diamond gleaming on her finger.

The boy was too much amazed to speak, and did not at all approve of his mother's action; but all his objections being based on an impulsive prejudice against the little doctor, would not have any weight in an argument against his mother's wedding, so he kept still.

When they came in sight of the tree-embowered cottage, they saw the yellow-eyed little doctor standing on the piazza, talking to Marie.

But they could not, of course, hear what he was saying.

It was, though, something to this effect:

"Marie, they are returning now, by Jove, and the boy looks well enough."

"Ah, doctair, here eez ze vial of ze drug I geef zem. Ze effect, eet vork away from ze boy like magic zees morning. How lucky zat ze mad voman geet loose, an' set my bed afire! Ma foi, eef not, zen you not vould smell ze smoke, vake up, an' see hair entair your room, to steal ze papair vich she sign, from your pocket!"

"True—true, by Jove! But you would have roasted to death had I not got up to chase her; and after she got out the window I found your room ablaze. So I put out the smoking and fiery bed-covers, saving you from death, and you, lucky woman, would go away, and found Ruric at the gate. Of course, we knew then he must have followed our coach, and at once brought him home, still senseless, and put him to bed. Then you cleared out your mistress' room, putting all

traces of the broken furniture away, and making it look as if a howling maniac had not been in there, destroying everything by bringing in similar furniture. Ha! ha! ha!"

"But ze mad voman geet away viz ze papair, monsieur?"

"Yes, confound her," said the physician, with a dark frown.

"But I will find it again as soon as I capture her."

"Ah! Parbleu! Zen she eez not yet capture?"

"No! A dozen of my asylum keepers are hunting for her, though."

Ruric and his mother, driving up just then, put an end to their conversation, and they all went into the parlor.

The boy felt uneasy in the presence of the doctor and on a slight pretext he left the room, put on his hat, and went out.

There was a small stable in back of the yard, and as he had taken a fancy to his mother's man-of-all-work, he bent his steps there to have a little chat with him about the previous night.

Dan was a new acquisition to the widow's household, Ruric learned from his mother that day, having come along like a tramp the previous month, looking for a job, when she employed him.

When Ruric reached the stable door he paused and peered in. A startling sight met his view.

In an empty stall stood Dan in an attitude of utter dejection, great tears rolling down his clean-shaven cheeks, sobs breaking from his lips, and in his hand he clutched a yellow wig.

His natural hair was jet black, and his appearance strangely altered.

"Hello, Dan! What does this mean?" cried the boy, jumping in.

The man started, a startled exclamation burst from his lips, he reeled back, and then he tried to replace the wig on his head ineffectually.

"Ruric!" he muttered, utterly aghast.

"Yes, Dan. But why under heaven are you wearing a wig? You don't need it, I am sure, unless it is to make you look ten years younger."

Dan was terribly confused, and could hardly stammer a reply.

"Wig? I—don't—that is—this—you——"

"Hold on. You are terribly flustered. What ails you?"

"Nothing," replied Dan, forcing himself to be calm. "Nothing at all."

"Why! And you don't speak countrified, either," sharply observed the boy.

Dan's face had grown pale. It now turned very red.

His confusion was increasing to a painful degree, too.

"Don't I?" he muttered, with a scared look.

"No. I see through it. You have disguised yourself for some purpose; that is very evident. You can't get out of it with excuses, so don't try to. Now, own up. What is your reason? I won't tell."

Dan replaced the wig on his head, dried all traces of tears from his eyes, and pondering a moment, he said, in his natural tones:

"Since you have found me out, I will confess to you. I am in disguise, Ruric, and I am prompted by a strange, but powerful motive. I know I can depend upon you to keep my secret. I am a friend to you, my boy, and heaven knows you will need one here, for a league of enemies are surrounding you."

"What do you mean by that, Dan?"

"Oh, I cannot explain myself at present. Let me give you this much information: Doctor Crane is a villain, and I am endeavoring to get certain information against him to cause his arrest."

"So—that's how it is, eh? I understand—you are a detective?"

"Well, perhaps I am, Ruric."

"Then I will keep your secret."

"I am sure you will."

"Did you hear the news, Dan?"

"News? What news?"

"My mother is engaged to be married to him."

"Oh, yes!" said the man, with a violent start. "I heard it when I drove you and her out, just awhile ago, in the surrey. But I can safely predict that wedding will never take place, if I can prevent it by any means. Your mother is not sure that your father is dead yet, is she? You know that their eleven years' separation annuls their marriage, but still, as your father may be living for all she knows, she ought not get married again."

"Just what I think. You see, therefore, that your idea that she disliked the doctor was erroneous—wasn't it?"

"Oh, she always pretended to dislike him formerly; you can

imagine I was surprised to learn that it was not only to the contrary, but that she is going to marry him."

"Why do you want to arrest him?"

"Do not question me about my secret, for I cannot divulge anything until it is properly matured; then you will learn all, and a startling surprise it will prove, I can assure you."

"Where were you last night, Dan?"

"Down to New York. I had some private business to attend to, and leaving here about nine o'clock, I did not return until this morning."

"Oh!" said Ruric, with a nod.

He now comprehended why Dan made no mention of any of the strange happenings of the night before, if they were indeed as true as he was firmly convinced they were; yet, if it was a dream, Dan would have known nothing, even if he had been present.

Finding his mind puzzling over the strange event again, the boy tried to dismiss it from his mind with a sigh, for he had counted on gaining some information from an, and was now disappointed.

He was about to turn away, when there sounded a frightful scream at the door behind him, and a maniacal voice crying:

"Listening! Listening at the door, eh? Ho! ho! ho! But I've got you!"

"Murder! Let me go! Par dieu! you choke me!" shrieked another voice.

Dan and Ruric, startled, rushed to the door.

There stood Marie, notebook in hand, caught in the act of taking down all Ruric and Dan's conversation, she having stealthily followed the boy from the house, and overheard all that passed in the barn.

And the person who held her by the throat was the maniac woman, attired in Marie's dress, her hair cropped short, and a wild, crazed look on her distorted face as she pounced on the French girl.

An asylum keeper had been pursuing her, and just then rushed in the yard.

Ruric's glance fell upon her as the keeper caught her and dragged her away and out the gate, aided by Marie, and reeling back in a frenzy, he hoarsely cried:

"Good heaven! it is my mother! It was no dream. She is a maniac!" and he fell in Dan's arms half-fainting from nervous shock.

CHAPTER V.

"I AM GODFREY GRUESOME."

A few moments later Marie returned to the stable and found Ruric pale and troubled, leaning against Dan, near the door, just recovered.

"Sacre!" she panted. "Eet vos von lunatics vot eescape ze asylum."

Dan had not seen the crazy woman's face, but he darted toward Marie, caught her roughly by the arm, and exclaimed:

"Now you tell me if you weren't listening out here when she caught you."

"Leesten—me—out—here?" stammered Marie. "Vy, no, sir, Meestair Dan."

"Do not lie! she said you did!"

"Zat ees ze great meeteek! I coam 'ere zat I tell Mastair Rureek to coam in ze house, hees mothair she weesh to speak viz heem."

"My mother!" wildly exclaimed the boy, glaring at the woman with distended eyes. "She was just here—here at the door—that poor, unfortunate lunatic. She is my mother. I knew I was right. I saw her last night as you and the doctor beat her and carried her away. I saw it all, I tell you."

The woman stared at him with an amazed look and recoiled a step.

Even Dan was startled and glanced curiously at the boy.

"You must be dreaming, Ruric," said he. "Your mother is no maniac—she is in the house. Don't you remember I just drove you and her out?"

The boy gazed at Dan with a bewildered look.

He passed his hand mechanically across his forehead, and then murmured:

"Yes—I think—I think I do. Yet—last—night. I—oh, Dan, am I a haunted boy, or am I becoming a veritable maniac myself?"

His voice was piteous, and his actions full of despair.

"Coam viz me," said Marie, softly touching his arm. "You certainly are not ver' well, Mastair Rureek, to sink ze lunatics eez your mothair."

The boy flung her hand from his arm as if it stung him.

"Let go of me!" he exclaimed, hollowly. "I distrust you!"

There is something sly and diabolically deep about you! I hate you! I despise you! I loathe you!"

Scared at the terrible look he gave her, Marie retreated.

"I go een!" she panted. "I tell your mothair you soon entair."

And so saying she sped away to apprise the doctor of all she overheard before the boy could get into the house.

She had seen the asylum keeper dragging the crazed woman away, and felt sure the poor unfortunate would be taken back to the asylum from which she had so adroitly made her escape.

Moreover, having discovered that Dan was not the person he represented himself to be, claimed his profession as that of a detective, and avowed it his object to get certain proof against the doctor to arrest him, she deemed it advisable to put the physician on his guard.

The doctor sat in the parlor alone when she entered.

He looked nervous and excited to a high pitch.

The moment Marie came in he bounded toward her, his smooth face twitching, his yellow eyes burning luridly, his long nose drawn down.

"That cry I just heard!" he cried, hoarsely, as he seized Marie by the arm. "What—what was it? Speak! Did I rightly recognize that voice?"

"Eet vos ze womans vot escape," replied Marie, nodding.

"Ha! then she is here?"

"Ze keepair pairsue an' breeng hair back."

"Did any one see her?"

"Ze boy."

"Oh, good heaven!"

"He recognize hair, too."

"Worse and worse!"

"Still worse, monsieur. Leesten to zees."

And she read her report of all that passed between Ruric and Dan.

Dr. Caleb Crane was a startled man when she finished.

"He a detective on my trail?" he groaned. "This is indeed a bad state of affairs. But it can easily be remedied, Frenchy. I must get him in my power and lock him up in the asylum. Oh, I am so glad the woman is recaptured. It relieves my mind."

Unfortunately for him, though, at that moment, on her way back to the asylum, the mad woman fell upon the keeper, overpowered him by her supernatural strength, felled him to the ground, and got away again.

Mrs. Gruesome entered the room just then smiling and radiant.

"Well, Marie, have you told Ruric to come in so that I could inform him when my marriage with the doctor takes place?" she asked.

The French woman and the physician exchanged significant glances.

Mrs. Gruesome did not notice it, however.

"Yais, ma'am," said the woman. "He soon coam een, but—"

"But what, Marie?" asked the woman, as Marie hesitated.

Marie tapped her forehead with her index finger, meaningly.

"Madame, I fear me zat ze boy ees affected een ze brain," said she.

Before any reply could be made to this pertinent observation the door was thrust open and Ruric rushed into the room, crying excitedly:

"I will convince myself! I will convince myself that the face of that maniac was not my mother's—that I am not haunted by a strange vision—that I am not a veritable maniac!"

His startled gaze fell upon Mrs. Gruesome.

A gurgling cry burst from his lips.

He paused, glaring at her like one who has suddenly received a blow that stuns all the sensibilities for an instant.

Then he recovered his faculties.

"My mother!" he fairly shrieked, as he held out his arms.

"Ruric! My son!" cried Mrs. Gruesome, in startled tones.

The trembling boy covered his eyes with his hands.

"I am haunted; haunted! haunted!" he groaned.

A deathly silence prevailed in the room for a moment.

Then Mrs. Gruesome started toward him.

"Ruric, my boy," said she, softly, "you are sick."

"The vision of last night is gone—the reality remains here!" the boy continued, looking up, a bright spot glowing on either cheek, "and yet they said she was mad. I saw her frenzied. But she is not crazy at all. For here she is natural, sane and well."

"Ruric," said Mrs. Gruesome, in strained tones, "my poor boy, have you had another of those dreadful hallucinations?"

He paused, shook his head mournfully, and said:

"Yes, they will haunt me forever, mother."

"You must let the doctor hear all about this, Ruric, and as it is his branch of the profession, he may be able to help you."

"He? Doctor Crane? Never!"

"Ruric, this gentleman is soon to become your father."

"My father? Yes, yes, you said to-day you were going to marry him. But he can never be my father else than by law."

"How strangely you rave, my son!"

"Forgive me, mother. I—I feel so forlorn."

A sneering smile flitted over the physician's smooth face, and he muttered beneath his breath:

"The young viper must have seen what transpired, by Jove! He and I must be enemies, but I will crush him. He saw the mad woman, and coming in here and meeting my future bride he cannot comprehend it. No wonder the little beggar is confused."

"Why do you speak this way, Ruric?" queried Mrs. Gruesome.

"Oh, mother, I do not know," replied the boy, despairingly.

"The doctor has figured so in what I saw, or thought I saw, last night, that I cannot reconcile myself to it, even to please you, and you are all I have in the world to love and cherish."

"Nonsense, Ruric, it was all some strange fancy. Banish it from your mind, my son, and you will soon forget it."

"Poor boy, poor boy!" sighed the doctor, sympathetically. "I do not know what ails him, Julia, but judging from what I hear I should say he is possessed of a certain morbid mania—an optical delusion, owing to a peculiar tumorous formation growing on the brain, which may be easily eradicated—"

"I have not," emphatically interposed Ruric. "Do not delude yourself about me. I am as sane as you are, sir."

At this moment the door opened again and Dan walked in.

He swept a keen, piercing glance around the room and saw Marie and the physician start with trepidation, draw closer to each other, and Ruric and Mrs. Gruesome glanced around.

"Dan!" ejaculated the lady. "What do you want here?"

"Mrs. Gruesome, I must have a word with you."

"Ah! How oddly altered your voice is!"

"Yes. Further concealment, I have concluded, is useless!" "What do you mean, sir? Have you taken leave of your senses?" demanded Mrs. Gruesome, in surprised tones.

"Not at all," was the cool rejoinder. "I must speak to you privately before Doctor Crane leaves this house, madam."

"You—speak—privately—with—me?" gasped the surprised woman.

"Exactly. That is just what I said."

"You forget yourself, Dan! Your boldness and impudence will cost—"

"Oh, do not threaten me! Your answer! Will you grant me an interview?"

"This audacity from you is appalling. I hold no private interviews with my servants. Speak out here—where you are."

"But, Mrs. Gruesome, I warn you it is not to your interest to have what I say made public," said Dan.

"Speak!" cried the lady in exasperation. "Speak, or leave this room!"

She drew herself up proudly and pointed at the door.

The man simply smiled nonchalantly and replied, in cool tones:

"Very well. As you like. I have offered you the last chance. Now, then, for my communication. I wanted simply to warn you not to marry Caleb Crane, that is all."

"You—advise—me? Dan, you are my hireling—do you forget it?"

"No, Mrs. Gruesome, I do not forget it."

"Then how dare you speak so? How dare you put yourself on equality with me—your mistress—to give such advice?"

And a haughty, scornful look—the proud, aristocratic Forrester look she inherited from her parents—swept over her face.

For an instant Dan was silent, regarding her with a peculiar look of bitterness delineated upon his face.

Then he said, in suppressed tones:

"Do not force me to go to extremes, madam."

"Extremes—my servant—my man-of-all-work! Ha! ha! ha! Extremes!"

"I can make a startling revelation—one that will crush you—if you drive me to desperation!" hissed Dan, angrily.

"Your boast mystifies me. I defy you, sir!"

"Then so be it. Say—do you know me? Look well upon my features, Julia Gruesome, and tell me, do you know me?"

He tore off his wig and stood exposed before her.

There was a deathly silence in the room.

Mrs. Gruesome glanced fixedly at the man.

"No," said she; "I see you were disguised, but I don't know you."

"Time, madam, has not altered my appearance a trifle. I am the same exactly as I was when you last saw me. Look again. Your memory could not have failed you so. Look again, I say!"

"I repeat, sir, that I do not know you," was the calm reply.

"Then shall I have to tell you who I am?"

"It is a matter of utter indifference to me," said the woman, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I care not who you are."

"Eleven years ago, then, you parted with your husband in anger, and he went to sea. You imagined he was dead. But he lived, following his nautical life. He has returned to you. I am Godfrey Gruesome!"

A simultaneous cry of amazement burst from them all, and Mrs. Gruesome gasped, in horrified tones:

"What! You, Godfrey—you, my husband?"

"I am, and I swear you shall not marry that man!"

A groan escaped Mrs. Gruesome's lips, and she fell fainting to the floor.

Ruric sprang to her side, and as Godfrey Gruesome started toward her, the doctor poured the contents of a vial on his handkerchief, clapped it to the man's nostrils, and uttering a groan, Godfrey Gruesome fell beside his son, overcome by the subtle drug, in the doctor's power.

CHAPTER VI.

THE APPARITION OF HIS MOTHER.

Ruric sprang to his feet and glanced at the recumbent form of his father in amazement, the strange odor of the chloroform assailing his nostrils in a most disagreeable way, but the doctor pocketed his handkerchief.

Marie had run to her mistress' side, and Caleb Crane stood close to the boy with a most innocent look upon his face.

"Bless my soul," said he, in hypocritical tones of surprise. "The man has fainted. He was dreadfully excited, and it has overwhelmed him. Of course, he was lying—he must be an impostor, Ruric."

"He an impostor?" cried the boy. "I doubt it. But I will soon see. My mother told me she had a photograph of him in her room, in an album, and I will get it to see if he told the truth."

"Nonsense. You saw that she did not recognize the man."

"It is very peculiar that she didn't, if he has not, as he asserted, changed any in appearance during the past eleven years, Doctor Crane. I'll go anyhow."

"By all means," blandly said the doctor, flourishing his hand. Ruric darted out of the room and ran upstairs.

"Monsieur," said the French woman, looking up.

"Well, Frenchy?"

"Ze mad vomans, she destroy ze album an' all ze pictures, sair."

"So much the better, my dear; so much the better. The boy can now prove nothing. Yet, had we had a picture of Godfrey Gruesome, there might have been a good deal of trouble avoided. Did you see it?"

"I deed, monsieur, and zees man ces Godfrey Gruesome!"

"Just see how the disclosure has affected my affianced. She feared he would prevent our marriage, and has fainted dead away."

"Parbleu! Zees ces ze day unlucky for us."

"On the contrary, it is a very lucky day, Frenchy, for look there!"

He pointed out the window, and Marie saw two of his keepers passing along the road, going toward the asylum.

"We will get this fellow to the asylum," continued the doctor, with a grim smile. "They will carry him away before the boy comes down, and once he is locked up in one of the cells, it will be an easy matter for me to carry out my plan of marrying the senseless lady, by Jove!"

"Ma foi! Just ze plan! Monsieur has ze big head surely!"

They grasped Godfrey Gruesome, dragged him outside and called the men.

They were given their orders, and hurried away with the drugged man.

Re-entering the house, the two plotters returned to the parlor, and Marie set about to restore the lady to consciousness.

A few moments later Ruric came downstairs, looking disappointed.

"I cannot find the picture," announced he, in disgusted tones.

"Well, bless me, it is needless," blandly said the doctor, for he recovered just now, and declaring it was all a jest, he ran

away. For my part, with all my experience with madmen, I am willing to swear to that individual's lunacy, as his words and actions were unmistakable. As he has run away you have proof enough of the foul lies he uttered."

Ruric was amazed at this cool announcement.

He had been expecting great things, but was disappointed.

His mother failing to identify the man made him suspect "Dan's" truth.

However, as the man was gone nothing could be done, so the boy aided in carrying the fainting woman up to her room, where she was laid on her couch, and left in Marie's care.

When she revived the physician held a long, private conversation with her, and then took his departure for the asylum.

It was the following day before Ruric saw his mother again.

She looked pale and careworn, and in answer to the boy's question about the alleged returned husband and father, she most emphatically denied that the man was Godfrey Gruesome, her missing husband.

In fact, she expressed it her firm conviction that the man was insane.

The very fact of her employing him, a tramp, said she, was enough to convince her that he was an unscrupulous person designing to blackmail her, this theory being corroborated by his wearing a disguise.

And convinced that his mother, if any one, ought to recognize her own husband, Ruric was satisfied that "Dan" was a fraud.

His mother persisted in signifying it her intention to marry the physician, and as the boy knew she was a determined woman, he did not try to dissuade her.

The wedding was fixed for a week later, to be held in the handsome Episcopal church on the outskirts of Irvingdale, and all the elite of the place was invited to attend the ceremony.

Mrs. Gruesome had ordered her wedding trousseau in New York, and on Friday morning, the day before the ceremony, she left the cottage, escorted by the doctor as far as the depot in his carriage, to go to the city to make her last few purchases, promising Ruric she would be home late that night.

Marie, too, had gone with her.

Ruric had his meals at a restaurant, and when night fell, he went home, and retiring to his room, he laid down to think, on his bed.

But before he knew it, he fell fast asleep.

How long he remained wrapped in slumber was a mystery, but he was finally awakened by a terrible sense of suffocation, and by feeling some one shaking his arm most violently.

Half asleep for the moment, he started bolt-upright.

The room was cast in darkness save for a streak of moonlight that streamed in through one of the open windows.

"Ruric! Ruric! Get up! Get up! The house is afire—the house is afire!"

It was his mother's well-known voice, and it was followed by a most infernal peal of laughter that struck a cold chill to the boy's heart.

He sprang from the bed.

The room was filled with blinding smoke!

But through the mist he saw the same wild creature with his mother's face whom he met that week at the stable door, holding on Marie!

She stood gesticulating on the arbor outside of his window, to where she hurried the moment she aroused him, and he sprang toward her, crying:

"Mother! Mother!"

But the next moment she vanished.

Whether she dropped through the dense foliage of the grapevines, or melted into thin air, the boy had no idea; but the fact remained that she was gone.

There was every evidence that the cottage was in flames, though, and the startled and dazed boy rushed out into the hall, down the stairs, and out of the house to the road.

There was a crowd of people there watching the conflagration, for the whole cottage was a mass of flames, crackling no one knew how, and so great that it was evident the house could not be saved.

The first persons Ruric encountered were his mother and Marie.

But she did not appear to be like the mad creature he just saw on the grape arbor, and a cold chill of horror shot through him.

"Great heaven!" he groaned. "Why am I tormented by that apparition so?"

Whether his imagination had played him a trick or not he did not know, but the conviction grew and intensified upon him that he was haunted.

His mother was stylishly attired, and claimed to have just returned from the city with Marie; indeed, they both carried bundles in their hands.

Mrs. Gruesome was weeping at the loss of the cottage, and begged Ruric to hurry over to the asylum to summon the doctor, whose advice she wanted to ask in her trouble.

Off started the bewildered, unhappy boy down the dusty road in the moonlight, feeling sure that he soon would become demented if he was pursued by the dreadful phantom of his mother any more.

He had traversed but half the distance to the great gray-stone edifice, thinking that now his mother was going to marry the doctor they would have to live in the abode of horrors, when he was startled by hearing a crashing in the bushes lining the road on the left-hand side.

Pausing breathlessly he listened.

A man's voice—and it was the doctor's too—reached his ears.

"You won't, eh?" he was shouting from amid the bushes. "But I say you will! You stole the paper from my pocket, and I am going to have it back from you if I have to kill you to get it!"

"Leave me be! Oh, merciful Father, help me! Don't strike me with your fist! Ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! Blaze away, you old curmudgeon!"

There sounded a terrific threshing about in the bushes, a demoniacal howl of agony, and then that terrible cackling again.

It almost froze Ruric's blood to hear it.

For the tones were in his mother's voice!

Into the bushes he crept, trembling lest his worst fears should prove true, his heart fairly in his mouth, and his hair bristling on his head.

He parted the bushes and glanced through.

A small, circular glen was before him.

In the middle stood the doctor, and on the ground the same wild woman with his mother's face, her form and her voice.

On his knees, Ruric groaned aloud, and burst into a cold perspiration.

"Can she be in two places at once?" he groaned, in agonized tones.

The doctor gave the screaming woman a brutal kick.

"I've got you, and you'll go back to the asylum, since you escaped the keeper to-day!" he shouted, furiously, as the woman rolled over.

But cut, bruised, bleeding and agonized as the poor creature was, she laughed jeeringly, suddenly bounded to her feet pushed the doctor over, sprang into the dense bushes, and vanished in a twinkling!

Ruric rushed into the glen as the physician arose.

"Doctor Crane!" he gasped, wildly. "Tell me—I implore you—I beseech you, was that woman my mother? Was she—was she? Speak!"

Amazed at his sudden and unexpected presence there, the doctor gaped and stared at him in speechless confusion a moment.

Then he pulled his wits together by an effort, and gasped:

"Your mother? Why, no. She is nothing like your mother!"

"She is! She is! Her face, voice, figure—all—all are the same."

"You must be out of your head, by Jove, Ruric—your fancy is playing a trick on you again. How came you here?"

"Our house was set on fire—is burning now, and my mother sent me—"

"Your mother sent you from the village? Then how can you say the mad old woman without any hair, who escaped from my asylum is her? You see, you must be as mad as a March hare!"

"It is either that, or I am a haunted boy!" gasped Ruric.

Mrs. Gruesome, and Marie, and Ruric then went to the asylum, as it was decided that they were to live there after the wedding, and while the authorities looked for the firebug the fire engine extinguished the flames.

Rooms were assigned them in the asylum, and men went out to hunt for the woman who had been haunting Ruric.

The next day, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the church was filled with the invited guests, and the doctor and his bride appeared.

Ruric and Marie were seated amid the guests.

It was to be a grand, showy wedding, as the doctor was thought to be rich, and all the wealthiest residents of Irvingdale were present.

The great organ ceased playing when the nuptial pair reached the railing and knelt down, and the ceremony commenced.

But hardly was the service half finished, when there sounded a wild, piercing shriek that rang through the sacred edifice thrilling every one.

And the next instant down the center aisle dashed the mad woman.

Every one started to their feet with cries of alarm.

Ruric bounded from his pew and made a rush at the woman.

"My mother! My mother!" he cried, in sobbing tones.

The doctor's face had turned as pale as death.

Like a madman he left his startled bride, and ran for the woman the same moment Ruric did.

They both caught hold of her at the same time.

"I will find out the truth now!" panted the boy.

"And I will get her out of here," grimly muttered the doctor, "or I am ruined, and will go to prison for it."

The mad woman, shouting and struggling in the meantime, was endeavoring to get away from them, but they both clung to her with a strength that she could not overcome.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. BENJAMIN H. BINGS.

The wedding guests in the Episcopal church were cast in an uproar of excitement to see the mad woman rush in so unexpectedly and interrupt the half-finished ceremony.

Mrs. Gruesome had been deserted by Caleb Crane, so that he could run over and seize his escaped patient, Marie rushed to her mistress' side, and Ruric caught hold of the woman who haunted him so, the same time the doctor did.

The boy was cast into a veritable fever.

He seemed to see his mother's face everywhere he went, at times when he knew she was absent, and in places she never was at.

First, it was in what seemed a wild phantasmagoria; next she appeared at the stable, then on the grape arbor, and last in a fierce struggle in the bushes with the doctor.

It was his mother—he could take a solemn oath to it!

"I will find out the truth now!" he had cried, thrillingly.

And equally as determined to get the mad creature out of the church, Caleb Crane struggled with him for possession of her, saying to himself that her remaining would send him to prison!

It was a singular situation, and as Ruric held on to his mother, and the doctor did likewise, the struggling woman flung up her arms and violently threw them aside, wrenching herself free by a terrific effort of her strength.

Then she made a dash for the door, uttering her unearthly laugh that sent a chill of horror through every one in the church, as they watched her strange figure disappearing.

"She transforms her appearance like a magician!" muttered Ruric, wildly. "She is possessed of mysterious powers of supernatural kinds to make two distinct beings of herself—to have two natures—to be in two places at the same time to—Ha! I thought so!"

He had looked back at the altar, and saw that the woman—his mother—the bride—had vanished; but he did not know that Marie had conveyed her to the vestry-room, while he was looking after the mad woman.

That led him to imagine his theory of the woman being invested with transformation power being true!

It must be borne in mind that the peculiarity of every incident in connection with his sight of the crazed woman was such as to mystify him—therefore it was not queer that he attributed everything to the unnatural.

"The bride of a moment ago is gone!" he muttered, in horror-struck tones, "and the wild monstrosity I struggled with is her other self, fled out the door! Am I not haunted—is it reasonable to think I am a fool? Oh, my life here is a burden to me—a burden! How happy I was at school! But—ah, there goes the doctor!"

Caleb Crane felt uncomfortable at finding himself the cynosure of all eyes, standing with the boy in the middle aisle, and wondering whether the face of the lunatic had been observed by any one save Ruric, he hurried into the vestry-room to join Marie and his bride.

Left alone, and seeing the minister follow the doctor, and every one rising as if to depart, Ruric put on his hat and rushed from the church intensely excited.

"I'll follow the strange creature!" he gasped. "I'll not give up until I fathom this awful mystery. Let me see: the spirit leaves the body as in a dream, making two people—no! Confound it, why do I speculate this way? I'll have my brain turned with perplexity if I keep on!"

When he got outside, he began to look around to learn in which direction the woman had gone.

It was not an easy matter; but he inquired of people he met, and finally got on her trail.

She was last seen heading toward the lunatic asylum, and Ruric ran down the dusty road as fast as he could go.

When he reached the spot where he had seen the doctor struggling with the woman the night before, the bushes parted and the crazed creature peered out at him.

Attired in the dress and shawl she had taken from Marie, she presented a most peculiar appearance.

The boy saw her face, and came to a pause.

"Mother! mother!" he cried, despairingly.

A loud laugh was all the reply he received, and then the face vanished from Ruric's sight, like a flash.

He sprang in among the bushes, and caught a glimpse of her flying figure fleeing from him at a rapid pace.

The boy was determined to catch her.

He could not define the feelings he underwent, but felt that one moment's conversation with her would clear away the wild fancy that possessed him of her being supernatural.

The woman, though, had been so ill-treated that she feared everybody, and made no distinction with the boy.

Away raced Ruric after her, and the bushes, saplings, trees and rocks impeding his progress, he had many a fall, bruise and scratch, but he kept pressing on.

The woman made a circuit toward the asylum gate, and as it was open she dashed through, past the keeper.

As soon as the man saw her he rang a gong that brought several of the institute keepers out in the yard, and just as Ruric dashed through the gate it was closed with a clash and securely locked.

The woman was in the yard now, and it seemed impossible that she could get out again, as the plank fence was high and there was no other exit from the grounds save the one gate.

She ran down toward the river side of the yard, and dashed over toward the gardener's tool-house in one corner.

There was a barrel standing close to the wall upon which she jumped, and then with the nimbleness of a cat she sprang up on top of the fence.

Ruric ran down the path toward her, but the mad woman balanced herself, with outstretched arms, an instant on the fence and then sprang off on the other side.

The boy was in despair of capturing her now, for he knew that she could easily get away with the start she had.

With the keepers summoned by the gateman running after him, he ran up to the barrel, and peering over the fence when he got on top of it he saw his mother rushing down the hill toward the glittering river flowing far below.

An instant later she disappeared amid the green foliage lining the shore, and the keepers went tumbling over the fence in pursuit of her, having seen at a glance what the trouble was.

Ruric said not a word, but went back to the asylum.

He went into the doctor's office, and sat down to await Caleb Crane's return from the church, a grim resolve in his mind to have an understanding with the wily physician.

Sitting in a chair near the window, he became so absorbed in thought that he did not notice the entrance of a stranger until he was suddenly startled by hearing an insinuating:

"Ahem—ahem!"

With a violent start, Ruric looked up.

Before him stood a tall, thin individual, as straight as an arrow, very narrow of chest, wearing a stove-pipe hat of extraordinary height, a high standing collar, a black cravat, a long, black Prince Albert coat, and a pair of excessively tight pants, that made his great big feet look much larger than they really were.

He wore a pair of black cotton gloves, carried an umbrella, and had a cadaverous face, a long, sharp nose, hollow eyes and a fringe of whiskers of a yellow color and sparse settlement, his upper lip being shaven clean.

One hand was stuck in the flap of his coat, the other leaned on the umbrella, his legs were crossed, one foot resting on the toe, and as stiff as a poker he stood intently regarding the boy.

"Ah!" exclaimed Ruric, suddenly, arising as this singular apparition appeared before his vision. "Good-afternoon, sir. I suppose you want the doctor?"

"Young man," said the stranger, in solemn tones, and without relaxing the rigidity of his elongated countenance, "the aforesaid remark applies exactly, as hereinafter will be demonstrated. Sit down! Ahem! Sit down!"

"A lawyer, by jingo!" was Ruric's mental comment as he complied.

He eyed the solemn stranger speculatively an instant, and said, abruptly:

"The same to you, sir. Sit down yourself."

The lanky, black-clothed, straight-laced stranger complied, with a sigh.

"In me, young man," said he, fixing an intent look at Ruric from his hollow eyes, "you behold a disciple of the immortal Blackstone, or, in other words, as hereinafter will appear, Benjamin H. Bings."

"I suppose you are the doctor's solicitor, sir," ventured Ruric, at random.

"Heretofore, my young and guileless friend," was the reply, with never a swerve of his settled, far away glance, "I may state that I have not had that felicity. But hereinafter, permit me to add, I expect to be favored as aforesaid in the settlement of a certain estate suddenly reverting to parties hereinafter to be named, theretofore cementing a bond of business and finance between us, which hereinafter may give general satisfaction."

"He's a crank," thought Ruric.

The skinny man winked at him knowingly.

Then he doffed his stove-pipe, drew a red bandana from out of the crown, and wiping his bald head very carefully (after laying his umbrella down on the floor), he dropped the handkerchief in the hat again, and put the faded tile on his head once more with the remark:

Judging by appearances, which is sometimes a great mistake, I may venture to announce it as my belief, pace tua, that you are domiciled here?"

"Yes," assented Ruric, "I live here. The doctor is my—my stepfather now."

"Indeed! Then, as a sequence, you heretofore figured as the offspring of a lady known and acknowledged in due form as the spouse of one Godfrey Gruesome, a person of nautical suasion, who was wrecked at sea?"

"My mother's name was Gruesome."

"Exactly so—exactly so; and, before her marriage, Julia Forrester—eh?"

"Yes; but why do you ask—how do you know?"

"My Christian youth, it behooves me to explain facts hereinafter to appear according to judicial form. The worthy physician and I have heretofore been in correspondence arising, as the Latin says, auri sacra fames. He has married your respected mother, and as the aforesaid case relates to the party of the second part of the contract; in other words, your mother, the party of the first part, or, in other words, the doctor, becomes the one to treat of the hereinafter-to-be-mentioned case."

"Do you mean to say my mother is involved in a legal case?"

"Precisely so, my discerning young friend. In short, she has suddenly fallen heiress to an immense fortune, and I, your humble servant, as the legal administrator of the deceased testator's effects, am retained to arrange the settlement of affairs, and make you all happy."

"Who was it that died and left my mother this fortune, sir?"

"Mr. James Forrester, the only living relative your mother had, my fortunate youth, his wife having passed away a week ago, and the fortune, amounting to over one million, has been willed to your mother and to——"

But just then the door was flung open with a crash, and before the rusty legal light could say "you," in rushed the doctor, interrupting him. Up rose the stiff figure of Benjamin H. Bings, out shot his hand, and, with the grip of two fraternal beings they shook hands.

The doctor was alone, and had heard what the lawyer was saying to Ruric, and he congratulated himself that he had just arrived in time to prevent a disclosure of what he wanted kept an inviolable secret.

CHAPTER VIII.

RURIC FINDS HIS FATHER.

After greeting the lawyer and enjoining him by a gesture to be careful of what he said before Ruric, the physician turned to the boy, and said, in concise tones:

"Your mother lies ill up in her room from the shock on her nerves produced by the advent of that lunatic in the church, and wants you to go up and see her, Ruric."

"Before I go," said the boy, with a dark look at the doctor, "I want to know something more about that mad creature."

"Oh, you do, eh?" said the physician, with an odd look in his yellow eyes, as the corners of his long nose went up and the end came down. "Then all I can say is that your mind, by Jove, is affected by some queer hallucination—that is all, for she no more resembles your mother than I do."

"Why did she rush in and interrupt the ceremony?"

"Ask her, my boy, ask her," said the doctor, coolly, with a

shrug of his shoulders. "You ought to know that there is no accounting for the vagaries of lunatics. They take a notion in their heads and follow it up, much the same as an animal will with no idea of why they do it."

Ruric shuddered and clasped his temples with his hands as he hurried toward the door, for the boy was prone to imagine that his own mind was affected somehow.

As soon as the doctor heard him ascending the stairs, he closed the door and turned to his caller, who sat in a chair by the desk as immovable as a statue, with:

"'Pon my word, Mr. Bings, the boy is a queer fellow—a very odd chap, indeed. But he's gone now, so by your leave we will talk of the occasion of your call."

"With all my heart, my Christian friend," said the rusty legal light, with a nod that threw his old plug hat over his left eye.

"Well, then, the cause of your call is, as I surmise, from having told you to come when it happened——"

"As hereinafter will appear, my worthy doctor, James Forrester died two days ago," solemnly said Mr. Bings, "and relenting entirely toward his recreant daughter in the end, he has made her and her son heirs to his immense fortune."

"Ah! The boy, too, is named in the will, eh?"

"Precisely so. The fortune aforesaid amounts to one million and a fraction, which said fraction may be left unmentioned, from the fact of its being about what will recompense Mr. Benjamin H. Bings for his legal functions in the matter; and one-third is named for the boy, two-thirds for his mother."

"I presume you have got the will?"

"My dear and worthy sir," replied the barrister, with a wave of his gloved hand, "that important document has been duly filed with the surrogate in forma propria, and there you may see it any time."

"Oh, yes, I see!" said the doctor.

"In behalf of your—ahem—your wife, my delectable sir," proceeded the skinny man, with a spasmodic cough behind his bony hand, "I may venture to surmise that you will make an effort, through the instrumentality of your humble servant, to lay claim to the aforesaid fortune. In point of fact, when you favored Benjamin H. Bings with a visit some days ago, at his sanctum sanctorum, you intimated that such a proceeding would inevitably ensue."

"True," assented the doctor, with a cagy look in his yellow eyes, "but are there any specifications in regard to the administration of Ruric Gruesome's share of this money in the will?"

"As in hereinafter to be shown," said the lawyer, stiffly, "it will become manifest that the daughter of deceased—the aforesaid Julia Gruesome, nee Forrester—shall be the aforesaid guardian."

"Ah!" said the sapient doctor in bland tones, and with a blander smile on his smooth face. "I see! I see! Very good! Very good!"

"And I may venture to say," proceeded the lawyer, "that you have the document duly signed and witnessed, that I prepared for you, against the event of your marriage, and the aforesaid demise of the testator in the case herein discussed?"

The doctor's face lengthened considerably, and he shook his head.

"No—not yet," said he, hesitatingly. "The fact is, you know, I have neglected the matter, but I can safely promise you to have it at your office by Monday or Tuesday of next week."

"Exactly—exactly so, my faithful friend," said the lawyer, with another nod that threw his plug hat back from his left eye. "It is a matter, though, which should not be neglected too long, as the sooner I get to work the sooner the aforesaid money will be distributed, and the happier we all will be—eh? As the Latin has it, labor omnia vincit—labor conquers everything."

"The document to give me power of attorney to manage my wife's business affairs," said Crane, "also including the care of my stepson's inheritance shall be soon forthcoming. My wife has signed it, but before I could get the signature of Ruric it was misplaced, and I have neglected to look for it. But have no fear of further delay, Mr. Bings—you shall have it next week. This is Saturday—a few days will not make very much difference I am sure."

"As aforesaid," the skinny lawyer remarked, with a blink of his hollow eyes and a scratch at his sparse yellow whiskers, "the sooner—and so forth, et cetera, my dear doctor. Duly signed and witnessed, sworn to, and filed, the heretofore mentioned paper wielded in my hands will evade much trouble to all parties interested, and place the whole matter of settlement in our power—on your part, as your wife is not well and the boy a minor, and my—hem! my part to hasten the interests

of my clients, and at the aforementioned same time recompense my work."

An explosive cough followed this speech.

"All right," said the doctor. "Count on me. Anything else?"

"Nothing, sir," said the lawyer, as he stiffly and solemnly arose.

Then he made a sudden clutch at his throat, coughed three times, like pulling corks out of a bottle, and added, with a gasp:

"Strange—strange—strange! The oddity of these attacks is singular——"

"What ails you?" queried the physician, in surprise.

"My dear doctor, it is a peculiarity of my family. The bronchial tubes suddenly become dry as tinder, from want of lubrication, and——"

"How would a little brandy go?" interrupted the physician.

"Brandy? I do not know, sir. But I occasionally oil the trachea to keep the common carotid artery in a normal state of activity."

He bent his elbow.

The doctor understood the mystic sign.

So he produced a bottle, glasses, and they imbibed what the lawyer denominated "hookers," after which Benjamin H. Bings departed.

When he was gone, the doctor vented a sigh of relief and the door opening, Marie came in from the adjoining room.

She had her notebook and pencil in her hand, having been assiduously at work jotting down the dialogue in phonography for the physician's benefit, unknown to him.

"Well, Frenchy" he said, taking a seat, "what news?"

"Ze boy, monsieur, go to madam's room," said the woman.

"As I ordered him to do. And then?"

"He tell hair all about ze mad vomans."

"At which she scoffed, of course—eh?"

"Sartainly, sair. Zen—vot you sink 'appen, par bleu!"

"Heaven only knows, Marie. What was it?"

"Rureek nearly find hair to be——"

"What?" shouted the doctor, in a sudden fit of alarm.

"'E ask hair to write von leetle note for heem to ze school, to zank ze professair for being so kind to heem an' she not know vot zat she say, until at last she tell heem zat she deed 'urt hair hand an' cannot write."

Another sigh of intense relief burst from the doctor's lips.

"Bless her heart! How cute, to be sure!" he gasped, feverishly. "Did you hear what I said to the lawyer, Frenchy?"

"Yais, monsieur. Eet I 'ave all written een ze book 'ere."

"Then you know that I must secure that lunatic and get the paper back which I forced her to sign."

"Yais, monsieur."

"If it was not for your fear of perjury I would have signed Julia Gruesome's name to it myself, forging it as cleverly as she could write it. But no—you would not do it, so I had to trace her name with my own hands, to overcome your scruples, so you could, with a clear conscience, swear you saw her affix her name to the paper."

"Monsieur," sweetly said Marie, "I know I be ver' bad vomans to do all I deed do for gold; yet all I do can be remedied: but to once take ze false oath to von forgery you cannot recall."

"The deuce take your nixety of conscience!" growled the doctor, savagely. "But never mind, I'll get the paper back by capturing the woman, and then send it to Bings, so as to get control of the legacy—do you see? Ha! What is that?"

The noise of voices in the hall, and a wild howl were heard.

He ran out, and there stood two keepers with the mad woman, whom they pursued down to the river, and had captured.

At the same moment there sounded a furious uproar upstairs.

The doctor rushed away in alarm, mounting the stairs three at a jump.

In the hall on which the lunatics were confined, he saw Ruric striving to open one of the cells, the madmen all around creating the furious disturbance he heard.

A cry of dismay burst involuntarily from the doctor's lips. For the cell contained Ruric's father—Godfrey Gruesome.

CHAPTER IX.

DOWN IN THE DUNGEON.

Having left his mother sitting in the elegantly furnished apartment the doctor had brought her to, Ruric had gone out in the corridor on which the cells opened, and heard some one call him.

It was his father, manacled hand and foot, in a cell.

"Good heavens!" groaned the boy. "The doctor lied to me. He did not run away from the cottage, a jesting impostor, but was sent here and confined! My mother is Crane's victim! She has committed bigamy by marrying the scoundrel!"

"Ruric!" cried the prisoner, frantically.

"My son! By all you hold sacred and dear, get me out of here! Caleb Crane did this. He wants to get me out of his way to perpetrate some rascality. In the midst of these madmen my brain will turn. Save me! Save me!"

"You are really my father, then?" panted the boy.

"I call Heaven to witness that I am!"

"I believe you. Yet my mother denied it—she did not recognize you."

"Ruric, she must have been mistaken. Once I am free I will prove to you that I am no impostor. I will prove to you that Caleb Crane is a villain—I will prove to you that some strange influence has been exercised upon your poor, deluded mother, to turn her so against me."

"It must be so!" panted the unhappy boy. "Heaven knows I have been strangely haunted by her. It all seems like magic to me. At one moment she seems the incarnation of sweet, motherly tenderness and love, when next I meet her she is changed strangely in appearance, a jeering, maniacal being, filling me with horror and disgust; a veritable fiend in looks and in nature."

"Open the door, Ruric. Let me out of here. And once I get my hands on the throat of that infamous reptile, Caleb Crane, I will wring a confession of the motive that actuates him from his villainous lips, if I perish doing it."

He clutched a bar of his cell in a frenzy, and violently shook it, making his manacles clank with a dismal sound.

Ruric's heart bled for the unhappy man, and he was endeavoring to get the cell door open when the doctor rushed up, pounced on him, caught him by the neck, and with one fling sent him reeling across the corridor, away from the door.

"Clear out of here! Clear out!" he shouted furiously.

"You liberate my father, you scoundrel!" cried the boy.

"Your father? Are you mad?"

"No, Caleb Crane, not as mad as you often intimate I am!"

"That man is not your father, I tell you."

"Then who is he, I'd like to know?"

"An incurable lunatic who strangely enough bears a slight resemblance to the impostor who deceived your poor mother at her cottage."

"Very likely!" sneered the boy. "It is very singular that two of your patients resemble my parents—according to your claim!"

The doctor savagely glared at him.

Just then Ruric beheld his father behind the doctor's back, making warning gestures to him; and apprehending at once what was implied he was suddenly struck with an idea.

"He wants me to keep still!" thought the boy. "It is a good plan. The doctor is sly and I must be cunning to outwit him. I'll throw him off his guard, and when I have a favorable opportunity I'll come back and liberate my father!"

"Well," growled the doctor, angrily, "what are you planning now?"

"Nothing at all," said Ruric, simulating a more cheerful and amicable exterior. "I have concluded that I may have been fooled by a fancied resemblance and a cute lunatic, after all."

"Ah! You are coming to your senses, by Jove!" replied the doctor, with a nod of approval. "If course you were. You might have set a most dangerous incurable free. Think of the consequence: He might have killed every one of us. Go in and talk to your mother—I know she will convince you that you have been deceived. I must go downstairs again."

The boy nodded and walked away, while Crane called a keeper.

"Watch that boy till he's in the room with his mother, then lock him in," said the physician. "The key is on the outside of the door. Then take No. 14 to cell No. 7 in the cellar. I am going downstairs to have the woman taken down. Warn all hands not to let the boy know where the man has gone, and that the woman has been recaptured. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the keeper.

The doctor then went down to the floor below, and the keeper obeyed his injunctions to the letter, making a prisoner of Ruric in his mother's room, and conveying Godfrey Gruesome down into a dark dungeon by a back staircase.

Upon reaching the lower floor, the doctor encountered the two keepers, who had captured the woman down by the river.

The unfortunate woman was screaming and raving, and

crouching back against the wall, in the clutches of the rough, burly men.

The moment her glance fell upon the doctor, a terrible fit of fury assailed her, and she strove with superhuman strength to break away from her captors and get at him.

"Don't let her get away, boys," grimly said the doctor. "Search her. She has a paper that is very valuable to me, and I must get it at any hazard. Tear every rag off her body, if necessary."

The brutal keepers were ruthless in the way in which they attacked the poor creature, and although they searched her thoroughly, not a vestige of the paper she had stolen from the doctor could they find.

"No, no, no!" cried the woman, quivering with excitement, as she wrestled in the strong grasp of her captors. "You cannot get it! You cannot get it! Ha! ha! ha! I have balked your design, Caleb Crane! I have thwarted your plans, you fiend in human form! It is hidden—safely, safely hidden! Do you hear me? Ho! ho! ho! Hidden, hidden, hidden, safely—well—where you can never, never get it. Ho! ho! ho!"

"Confound her, she has balked me!" hoarsely muttered Crane, "but I shall wring an avowal of the truth from her lips, if I have to torture her to death in order to find it. Away with her—down in the dungeon with her—take her to No. 4, and by heavens I shall force a confession of the paper's hiding-place from her!"

Hardened and brutal as the keepers were, they glanced at each other and shuddered at mention of taking the poor woman down to that cell, for they knew what that meant!

They were dragging her, screaming, away, when there came a ring at the door-bell, accelerating their movements, and causing a dark frown to appear on Caleb Crane's brow.

He was obliged to forego accompanying them, and as they disappeared down a gloomy flight of stairs with her, the door-keeper admitted a man to see the physician about taking a patient.

Caleb Crane's institution was a private asylum, and he did an excellent business there since he started the madhouse.

The building itself was an old Revolutionary structure, which had been occupied by a certain order of Jesuit priests when he bought it; and finding it hardly large enough for his purpose, as his business grew, he had it enlarged piecemeal, until at last it assumed its present proportions.

Having rid himself of his caller, he was about to go down to the dungeon, when a furious ring at a bell in the office summoned him upstairs to his wife's apartments.

He hastily answered the call, softly unlocking the door on the outside, and pocketing the key.

"Why, Caleb," said his bride, in surprised tones, "what ailed the door? I tried to open it and it seemed to have been locked."

"Poch, pooh, my dear," blandly said Crane. "It was stuck in the jam. I must have a carpenter fix it to-day. It opened rather hard just now, I noticed. Did you want to come out?"

"No, Caleb, but Ruric here wished to go out," she replied.

She was a sweet and gentle-looking woman, and seemed to entertain the most profound affection for the boy.

Ruric smiled when the doctor entered, and then said:

"Doctor, as you are now my stepfather, will you please write to my old professors for me, saying you and my mother are satisfied with what they have done for me. It is most singular about you, mother. You tried to write the letter for me, as you were always an elegant writer, but I declare your chirography was strangely changed; you inscribed the letters terribly, the spelling was awful, and at last you gave it up in despair. Of course, if you hurt your hand as you said, you cannot do as I asked."

Mrs. Crane looked at her husband, and he glanced at her in a peculiar manner, which the boy did not observe.

The doctor readily consented, though, and after the letter was written, the boy took it, saying he was going to the village to post it, and left the room and descended the stairs.

When he got down in the lower hall he paused near the door of one of the keepers' rooms, his attention being arrested by what he heard two of the men saying inside the apartment.

"Yair, Bill, I caught her down by ther river ter-day, an' Jim an' me brung her in here, an' tuck her down in ther dungeons."

"Why, Hank, that's where the doc told me to take the feller who the boy was trying to get out of his cell. He's in No. 7. The old feller don't want the boy to know anything about it, neither."

"And I brung ther woman to No. 4."

"Oh, ho! The torture cell, eh?"

"Vair. I reckon ther ole cove's a-goin' ter make her howl; too."

"Did you say the boy was chasing her in the yard?"

"Certain he was, an' nigh caught her, on'y she flipped over ther fence, an' got away from him right smart, she did."

"Why," muttered Ruric, in amazement, "they have caught the unfortunate being I believed to be my mother, and have put her down in the cellar. Fortune favors me. And my poor father is down there, too! Now is my chance! I'll slip down there and liberate my father. Then we can get the woman out, and if she is my mother—but, pshaw! how can she be? I just left my mother up in her room, smiling and happy."

He hurried through the hall, and taking a candle from a rack with some matches, he went down to the vaults.

A broad flight of stairs led to the cellars, and an arched passage, damp, cold, and reeking with filth and vermin, met his view.

There were a dozen iron-barred cells opening on this passage, and by the aid of his candle he located No. 7.

"Father!" he cried, running to the door.

"Oh—Ruric! Thank heaven! Is it you, my boy?" cried the man in the cell, as he rushed to the door and peered out through the bars.

"Ay! And I am here to release you!" cried the boy.

The door was bolted on the outside and he opened it.

Godfrey Gruesome stepped out in the corridor, and Ruric rushed off to the cell numbered four, held up his candle and peered in.

There crouched the mad woman he sought, her back turned toward him, muttering incoherently to herself in low tones.

"Ruric! Ruric!" cried the man, in startled tones.

"What is it?" demanded the boy, in alarm.

The woman turned around just then and glared at him ferociously.

He was startled frightfully, for it was his mother's face he saw!

"Fly!" thrillingly cried his father, in smothered, frantic tones. "Look there!"

"The doctor and two keepers approaching with a lantern!" gasped the boy.

"He may kill you for venturing to do this!" muttered his father.

Ruric hastily extinguished his candle and glided over to his father's side, watching the approaching light and men in alarm.

He hardly dared guess what his fate would be if they caught him there liberating his father from the dungeon.

CHAPTER X.

CELL NO. 4.

Cell No. 4, down in the madhouse dungeon, wherein the crazed woman crouched whom Ruric saw by the light of his candle before he extinguished it, was a torture-chamber!

The boy did not know it positively, but surmised that there was something wrong about it from what he heard the two keepers saying in the doctor's office.

He had the letter clutched in his hand which the doctor had written to his old professors at Albany, as he joined his father in the dark corridor outside of cell No. 7, to where Godfrey Gruesome stepped when Ruric unlocked his cell door.

The man was manacled hand and foot, though.

They watched the lantern carried by the doctor, as Crane approached with the two keepers, and saw that Ruric could not escape by retracing his steps, for they were at the entrance to the damp, dirty and gloomy corridor just then.

Crane might injure the boy if he discovered him liberating his father, and what to do the boy did not know for a moment; to remain inactive, though, meant exposure!

The boy's mind was queerly thrilled over the fact of his mother writing the letter she attempted so badly, her spelling and composition being so different from that nice style which had always formerly characterized it while he was at school.

But he had no time to speculate over this just then, for the doctor and his assistants were dangerously near, and their grim looks showed that they were bent upon forcing the woman to confess where she had hidden the paper, which she signed for the benefit of Benjamin H. Bings, the solemn-visaged lawyer.

"Into the cell—quick! Come with me!" gasped his father. "It is your only means of concealment!"

He caught the boy by the wrist, and pushing him through the open door, he glided in himself and drew the door shut. And he was just in time, too!

The next instant the doctor and the two keepers reached

the cell, and came to a pause in front of it, holding up the dull-glowing lantern, so that its rays fell upon the iron bars.

There was a wretched iron cot in the cell.

The moment Ruric got in he lightly got on to it and drew the covers over his body, concealing himself.

Godfrey Gruesome remained at the door.

He clutched the bars with his manacled hands, and glared out at the newcomers in a baleful manner.

"Ah!" said the doctor, upon catching sight of him. "You are there, are you, my boy? I hope you are pleased with your quarters."

"Rascal!" exclaimed the man, grating his teeth. "You shall not keep me confined here long."

"By Jiminy!" suddenly interrupted one of the keepers, in startled tones, as he pointed at Gruesome's cell, "looker there."

The prisoner started, and his face blanched.

"The door is unlocked, by Jove!" gasped the doctor.

Godfrey Gruesome's heart sank like lead in his bosom.

"Our plan is frustrated!" he muttered.

He was just about to fling the iron door open, spring out and attack them, in a mad hope of getting away.

But before he could accomplish his design, the other keeper sprang forward, and "click" went the bolt.

The door was securely locked.

Ruric was made a prisoner with his father.

The doctor's yellow eyes snapped and sparkled, and a jeering laugh pealed from his lips, as he cried:

"Defeated, Godfrey Gruesome! You cannot escape me now!"

"You villain! Then at last you acknowledge I am Godfrey Gruesome?"

"Oh, yes! You can do me no harm by knowing the truth. Marie Montmedy saw your photograph in your wife's bed-chamber at her cottage once, and acknowledged to me that you were the original of the picture, when you threw off your disguise as 'Dan,' the hired man," said Crane.

Godfrey Gruesome kicked the cot to call Ruric's attention.

But the boy had overheard every word, and a thrill shot through him as he realized that it was now proven beyond a doubt that the man was really his father.

"And knowing this," proceeded the prisoner, gloomily, "you had the audacity to make an effort to marry my wife!"

"True. In fact, she is now my wife, by Jove!"

"Your wife?"

"We were married to-day."

"What! Oh, but it was bigamy."

"Not at all!" interrupted the doctor, blandly. "In eleven years you have neither lived with her nor supported her, and less time than that is requisite to annul your marriage in this State. Hence, she was free to marry whom she chose."

Godfrey Gruesome uttered a groan, for he knew that this was true; and Ruric felt a deep sense of relief creep over him to learn that his mother had not criminated herself in any way by marrying the doctor.

The doctor then walked away without uttering another word, and crossing the corridor to No. 4, Gruesome saw him, Bill and Hank open the door and pass inside.

The only light to be seen now was what rays streamed out on the corridor between the iron bars of the cell door.

Ruric arose and, throwing off the covers from the cot, he went to the door and joined his father.

He was just about to whisper something when Godfrey Gruesome made a warning gesture, and pointed out into the gloomy corridor before the cell.

Ruric glanced out and was startled to see Marie glide into view, her figure looking dim and shadowy in the gloom.

She held her notebook and pencil in her hand, and as she crouched silently down in front of Gruesome's cell, they saw that she was intent upon taking down all she heard said, in shorthand.

The doctor and his assistant were in a gloomy vault, made of large blocks of stone, in which some rings of rusty iron were welded in the left-hand wall and in back.

There was an iron cot at the extremity, and the mad woman had thrown herself upon it, when they came in in a paroxysm of fear and fury.

But she was not as violent as she had been, for in the lapse of the week, since which Marie had given her the doctor's terrible concoction of chloral hydrate, cocculus, atropa, belladonna, and dhatocra, the effect began to wear off.

Indeed, the French woman before that had systematically been dosing her with different ingredients of the drug for a long time past, and when the final decoction was administered it served to achieve the climax the doctor had been preparing her for.

With the wearing away of the powerful drug's effect

woman's reason gradually began to return, and the faculties which had been shattered resumed their functions.

This was a result the doctor was aiming at.

The poor creature recognized him with a shudder as he entered, and the diabolical expression on his face told her that he contemplated mischief toward her.

The two keepers stationed themselves near the closed door, with a lantern, and the doctor walked on to her side.

"Do you recognize me?" he demanded, roughly.

His practiced eyes told him the state she was in plainly enough.

"Yes," came the trembling reply, "you are Doctor Crane. Ho! ho! ho!" she added, with a sudden burst of lunacy. "I know you."

Then she crouched back against the cot again in a fit of trembling.

"She resembles a lunatic now, by Jove!" mused the doctor. "Lunatics have lucid intervals—idiots are born with a radical infirmity—that is incurable—a maniac rages with a disordered intellect—an imbecile is of weak, impotent mind. But she—she is a lunatic."

He glanced at her furtively an instant, and then added:

"Where is the paper you signed which you stole from me?"

There came a sudden glimmer in the woman's eyes, and a cunning expression flitted over her face.

"I don't know," she replied. "I don't know—I don't know."

Then she began to laugh softly to herself, mutter incoherently, and as she clutched at her cropped hair saliva began to dribble from her mouth and a queer look to enter her eyes.

"You lie!" exclaimed Crane, angrily. "You lie! Tell me where you have hidden it, or, by heavens, I'll force you to!"

He struck her a terrible blow with his clenched fist as he made this threat, knocking her from the cot across the cell, where her body struck the wall with a bang.

She began to laugh and cry alternately, meantime protesting with one breath that she did not know where she put the paper, and with the next defying him and saying that he would never force her to tell.

It was a heart-rending sight, but the men were used to it.

Springing upon her with beastly ferocity, the little doctor caught her by the throat as she was arising and bore her over upon her back on the flagstones.

"Now tell me, tell me!" he yelled. "I will have no nonsense from you. Do you hear, tell me, or——"

He had hold of her neck so tightly that the shriek which arose to her lips ended in a gurgling, gasping moan.

He nodded to the two men, they set the lantern down, and springing forward, they tied the struggling woman to one of the rusty iron rings in the wall with a piece of rope, by the elbows, and drawing out her arms, held her hands.

The doctor dug his thumb-nail under the nail of her first finger on the right hand, and she screamed aloud with the excruciating agony thereby produced, her body convulsively writhing, and her eyes starting from her head.

"Mercy! Mercy!" she shrieked. "Oh, heaven! This is terrible!"

"Will you confess?" hissed the doctor, sardonically.

"Oh, I do not know where I put it!" she wailed.

"Obstinate, by Jove!" exclaimed Crane, furiously. "Strip her, boys!"

Then two brutal keepers tore the shawl and waist off her back, and Hank produced a rope's-end.

No Russian knout was a more formidable-looking instrument of torture, for each strand was tipped with a piece of lead.

"Pitiful heaven! let me be!" cried the unfortunate woman, frantically, as she made a furious but vain endeavor to get free.

"No—no—no! I'll kill you if you don't confess!" hoarsely cried Crane.

A fit of madness overcame the tortured creature just then, and she burst into a wild peal of maniacal laughter, that ran weirdly through the gloomy vault, awakening a dozen echoes.

The doctor's clean-shaven face grew purple.

He made a savage gesture, and the keeper who held the rope's-end began to belabor the woman upon the back.

The instrument was wielded by a heavy, strong and merciless hand, and each brutal blow raised a great inflamed ridge upon the delicate white skin of the poor creature, and shriek after shriek for mercy pealed from her ashen lips, as blow upon blow was rained upon her, each welt paining as if fire were searing the flesh.

The inexorable doctor gazed on indifferently, repeating his demand, again and again, for the paper.

At last the keeper came to a pause from sheer exhaustion.

It was fortunate he did, for his victim was on the verge of fainting.

"Tain't no use!" he growled. "Yer kain't make her own up."

The doctor was furious, but relentless.

"Then, by Jove, she shall sign another!" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

"Anything! Anything!" groaned the poor woman. "Oh, this is too much—too much! You will kill me! You will kill me!"

Foreseeing that he might be disappointed of discovering the paper, Crane had provided himself with another, which differed a little from the first, and he now drew it out of his pocket.

Bill had pen and ink, and they loosened the woman's arms.

She was then ordered to affix her signature, under promise to be left alone if she complied; and with a remarkably firm hand she inscribed the name "Julie Gruesome" at the bottom.

The doctor glanced at the chirography by the lantern light, and a look of ineffable joy crossed his face as he saw that there could be no denial of that name or handwriting.

Then he flung the woman on the cot, muttering:

"Good! good! The game is in my hands now! I must get Marie to witness it, and to-night when this creature gets her food it will contain enough of the drug to craze her again. Securely locked in here she will remain a prisoner all the rest of her life, no one the wiser, and I—I successful in my plan!"

He left the cell with the keepers.

The moment he was gone the mad woman got up from the cot.

"I know not what that paper said," she muttered, "nor do I know what your game is, Caleb Crane, but I do know that you are the cause of all my misery now, and that you would not imprison me here without a reason—a potent reason, too! The blank horror of that subtle nightmare I passed through is gone. I feel as if a cloud was suddenly lifted from my brain. I know all that passed, and yet it was like a dream. There is but one cause. I have been drugged! I have been crazed. Still all the while I have known what has passed. I knew how wildly I acted. I remember you taking me from my home—carrying me here—how I was forced to sign that paper—how I stole it—escaped—and at last I set my cottage on fire—warned Ruric—fled—met you—fought, and in the end was recaptured. But the paper is safely hidden—I know where—and, with what I have just discovered, I shall balk your plot most cunningly!"

And as she spoke she crept over to the back of the cell, and grasping one of the rusty iron rings welded in the wall with both hands, she gave it a turn, and pushed against the large, flat stone to which it was fastened.

The stone swung back like a door, disclosing a dark passage in the wall, from which a cold, damp draught came.

"How fortunate I remembered the history of this old Revolutionary building!" she whispered. "How well I remembered that it was the abode once of the priests—and that its secret passages were discovered by my husband when he was with me. Godfrey told me all. And now I can escape from here and turn the tables on you, Caleb Crane! Farewell, my prison—den of horrors—place of loathing! Farewell! May your dark and gloomy walls never again contain so unfortunate a being as I am, for I have almost seen the last of you now. Farewell!"

And as a great sigh proceeded from her lips, she passed through the yawning opening, the secret door of stone swung back in its place, and she vanished in the mysterious passage that was destined to lead her to the culmination of a design she had schemed out in her tortured mind.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT'S MYSTERIOUS HAPPENINGS.

Marie Montmedy glided away from near the door of cell No. 4 when she heard the doctor preparing to leave, and Ruric and his father were shuddering with horror at the awful cries of the doctor's hapless victim.

But they could not help her any, for they were securely locked in, yet they overheard all that passed.

When the physician, Bill and Hank emerged from the cell of torture with their lantern, Ruric and his father were wondering what the object was Crane had in trying to secure that paper—what its contents were, and who his helpless victim in No. 4 was.

The boy was just upon the point of creeping back into the cot again, when the door was suddenly flung open, the light of a lantern flashed into the cell and he was exposed.

"Ruric!" gasped the startled doctor, recoiling, aghast.

"I may as well own up. I am here, and overheard all," said the boy, boldly, as he darted out of the cell.

Bill slammed the door shut again.

"You—were going—to—the village—to—post—the—letter—to—your—school?" gasped the doctor, in jerky tones, as he seized the boy by the arm.

"So I was. I altered my mind, though, and came down here instead, Doctor Crane," he replied, defiantly. "Let me go!"

"You young scoundrel, how dared you?"

"Oh, I know now from your own confession that this man is really and truly my father, and I was going to set him at liberty, when you entered and spoiled my plan."

"By Jove! your audacity will cost you dearly!" fumed Crane, as he violently shook the boy.

"Oh, what can you do to me?" scoffed Ruric.

"You shall see! Just wait—you shall see! Bill, just take this fellow upstairs and lock him up in a cell. He is demented—absolutely demented!"

Ruric turned pale in the face.

"What!" he cried, indignantly. "Would you dare try to make me out a lunatic now, in order to make me a prisoner?"

"My dear boy," coolly said the doctor, "there is no denying the deplorable fact that you are a little off in your upper story. Just review the evidence you have shown. You have publicly said you were haunted. You unreservedly avowed on several occasions that an escaped lunatic from this establishment was your mother, when you knew very well that your mother is as sane as you are. In fact, you have woven such a web of evidence around yourself that I can prove by many witnesses that you are crazy, and consequently incapable of taking care of yourself. Therefore, I must take care of you. My lawyer—Mr. Bings—has instructions to make me your legal guardian, now that I am your stepfather, and as such I must control your further actions, lest you injure both yourself and others about you."

"Doctor Crane, you are doing this with some rascally motive."

"Am I? There, there—don't rave. Come, Bill, take the poor little demented fellow away. It is too bad, I know, and I feel sorry for him from the bottom of my heart. But what is to be done under the circumstances? Nothing but look out for the unfortunate child's welfare. Take him up to Ward B—cell No. 10, Bill. Take him away, my boy."

And before Ruric could remonstrate or fight against it, Bill caught hold of him, and he was dragged away.

"Oh, if I only had my liberty!" shouted Godfrey Gruesome, in tones of fury, "you would regret this, Caleb Crane!"

The doctor glanced at the iron-barred door, behind which the man stood, and laughed outright, crying sibilantly:

"No danger, though, of that, Godfrey Gruesome—no danger of that. You will never leave that cell until you are a corpse."

Then he followed the two men away, leaving Gruesome muttering threats against him from within the cell. Bill dragged the unwilling boy through the cellar, up the stairs into the asylum, then up on the second floor.

"Mother! Mother!" shouted the boy as he passed her room. The door was flung open and the lady appeared.

"Why, Ruric, my son, what is the matter?" she asked.

"They are going to lock me up—the doctor says I am crazy."

"Oh—come along with me!" roughly interposed Bill.

Just then the physician appeared, caught his wife by the arm, and despite her protestations he led her into her room, and made a gesture to Bill to go on with Ruric.

The boy saw that resistance would do no good, so he accompanied the keeper docilely, confidently expecting that his mother would argue the doctor out of his spitefulness and secure his release from the cell at once.

But after he was thrust into the cell he remained there all night without the lady showing any sign of having him released; and the alarmed impression grew upon his mind that perhaps the doctor convinced his mother that he was crazy.

His actions and remarks of late had not been rational, and he knew that he might have to undergo a medical examination now to verify the truth or falsity of the doctor's charge against him of lunacy.

Both he and his father prisoners, and at the mercy of such an unscrupulous man as Caleb Crane was, he had not much hope of a future happiness now.

It was patent that the doctor wanted to keep his father's existence a secret—probably on account of his marriage with his bride, and Ruric's impression concerning himself was that the doctor knowing he was aware of his villainy, wanted to put him where he could not make it public!

It made the boy feel very despondent.

When the doctor emerged from his wife's room he met Marie in the hall, beckoned her to follow him, and hastily made his way downstairs to his office.

The woman followed him, and when they were alone and the door closed and locked the doctor said, gleefully:

"I've got another paper signed by the woman, Frenchy."

"Vell, monsieur, an' vot eez zat?" replied Marie.

"The woman would not confess to the hiding-place of the paper she signed, and then stole from me, by Jove! You recollect how I had to hold her hand to trace the name so that you could have no scruples against swearing to it?"

"Yais—yais. An' zen?"

"Well, as I could not get the paper, I had another ready. It makes me guardian of the boy. It gives me power of attorney to act in behalf of both Ruric and my wife."

"An' so deed ze othair papair, monsieur."

"True. But there is a new clause in this document which the other did not contain. I have locked the boy in a cell, charging him with being insane. You know how he has been raving about seeing his mother in two places at once, and so on? That is enough proof for any jury to declare his mind is affected. He has openly acknowledged that he is a haunted boy, in fact, and now for the point at issue. You know James Forrester left one-third of his fortune to Ruric and two-thirds to the boy's mother?"

"Yais—so I 'ave eet written een in my book vat Meester Beings say."

"Well, then, Frenchy, here is the idea: According to law lunatics are not allowed to handle fortunes, and their signature to legal documents is invalid. By proving Ruric to be insane, and as his mother is named his guardian until he is twenty-one, she will get the whole fortune in her own hands, and I in turn get control of it as her power of attorney. Don't you see? My wife is perfectly willing to this arrangement going through. And now, as I have a real, genuine, unforged signature of this paper, I want you to accompany me to a notary public with my wife, and with your signature to it, swear to the paper. You can vouch for the way Ruric has been acting and talking of late, can't you? Well, that is enough."

"An' ze five sousand dollair you promised me, sair?"

"Shall be forthcoming the moment this estate is settled up."

"Zen, monsieur, ze papair I sign, an', by gar, I readily meek ze affidavit to vot ze boy say about being haunt."

The doctor chuckled gleefully, rubbed his hands together, and with a nod of approval saw Marie sign the paper.

Then he called up the cook from the kitchen, gave him the vial Marie had used on Ruric and his mother, told the man to put four drops of the medicine in the breakfast to be sent down to cell No. 4 next morning by the negro who brought the incurables their meals, and the man promised to attend to the matter, as he did with other patients.

When he was gone the doctor, his wife, and Marie left the madhouse and drove to the village.

It was pitch dark when they returned, supper was partaken of, and then the doctor went away to go to New York.

He wanted to put the paper in the hands of his lawyer at once, and transact some other business that night, and as he could not very well return to Irvingdale till next morning, he told his wife not to expect him.

It was on the nine o'clock train he left, and after he was gone Marie and her mistress retired to Mrs. Crane's private apartments on the second floor.

They consisted of a magnificent suite of rooms in one of which Marie slept, adjoining her mistress' room.

Marie sat talking to her mistress an hour or more, and then retired to her room, as Mrs. Crane complained of feeling unwell.

The madhouse keeper's wife soon extinguished the light and went to bed, while Marie, after reading her shorthand book through, laid it upon the table in her own room, and with the gas-jet turned low, followed her mistress' example.

It was perhaps an hour after that when a panel in the wainscoted wall in Mrs. Crane's room slid open, and the mad woman from cell No. 4 peered into the room.

Then she softly glided through the aperture, passed swiftly through the apartment, out into the silent hall, and glided into Ward B, where she eyed the doors of the cells as she hastened along.

Pausing before No. 10, she unbolted the door and vanished inside, where Ruric lay fast asleep on a cot.

She shook him by the shoulder, and with a startled cry the boy bounded to his feet, glaring at her in the obscurity in a wild, bewildered way for an instant.

She had overheard what passed down in the dungeon be-

tween the doctor, Ruric, his father and the two keepers before she had passed into the secret passage that honeycombed the whole house, in the wall of her cell, and therefore knew just where to look for the boy.

Before Ruric could utter a word, though, she fled from his cell, leaving the door standing wide open as a sure indication that she designed his escape; and ere he could step out of the cell she had flashed back into the doctor's room.

Closing the door, she glided into Marie's room.

The French woman was fast asleep on the bed, but her notebook caught the woman's eyes and, with a start, she eagerly seized it from the table, assured herself of what it was, and then hid it in her pocket.

Marie was losing a veritable treasure to herself, for that book contained a minutely detailed account of everything in connection with the doctor's mysterious schemes.

Then the woman returned to the doctor's room, closed Marie's door, securely locked it, and approached the bed.

The room was now cast in impenetrable darkness since the faint glow from Marie's room was shut off.

The sleeping woman was suddenly and roughly seized, started up, but the cry that arose to her lips was smothered the next instant by the hand of the man woman choking her.

A terrible struggle then took place in the dark room, hardly a sound being made, and then there came an ominous silence, until something fell from the bureau on the floor.

It sounded like a pair of scissors, but no light was thrown on the object, and only a soft, rustling noise followed.

The night wore on slowly and silently in the room.

When daylight came the door opened and Ruric entered.

His mother lay in bed, pale and ghastly, and Marie sat beside her, binding a wet rag around her head.

She was evidently very sick, and the boy uttered a sharp cry, and ran toward her, throwing himself on his knees at her bedside.

He had gone to his room, but could not sleep all night, wondering whose shadowy figure it was that had been in his cell, liberating him, as he had not seen the face or figure of the woman in the darkness.

But he imagined it was his mother—haunting him again.

Hardly, though, had he reached the bedside when the doctor entered.

Seeing the boy free, he uttered a cry of rage, and sprang upon Ruric, flinging him away from the bedside.

He raised his fist to strike the boy, when he was startled by hearing a clear, ringing voice behind him cry, sternly:

"Hold, Caleb Crane! Don't you dare strike that boy!"

A wild cry of alarm escaped Crane's lips as he glanced around.

In the doorway stood Godfrey Gruesome—free!

CHAPTER XII.

A VAIN STRUGGLE.

Ruric was as much amazed to see his father standing in the doorway as the doctor was.

Godfrey Gruesome had been securely locked up in cell No. 7, down in the dungeon of the madhouse.

Yet not only was he now free, but he had been relieved of the shackles with which he had been manacled.

Marie sprang to her feet as Ruric threw himself upon his knees at the side of his sick mother's bed, very much startled at the entrance of the boy.

Although her room-door had been locked by the mad woman the night before, when she arose it was open again, and no sign of the struggle her mistress had with the doctor's mysterious patient was visible.

But Marie missed her notebook, which the woman had taken, and failed to find it after a long search.

She had not been surprised to find Ruric's mother sick, though, as it will be remembered that the doctor's wife had gone to bed complaining of feeling unwell.

On hearing Godfrey Gruesome's sharp order, the doctor's clenched fist dropped at his side while in the very act of striking Ruric, and his smooth-shaven face blanched with surprise; he reeled back, glaring at Godfrey Gruesome, his yellow eyes bulging, and his small figure quaking with dread.

How Ruric got out of cell No. 10, in Ward B, was a mystery to the doctor, too, and he at once imagined that both father and son were liberated by the same person.

Nor was his surmise wrong, for it really was the crazed woman who had liberated Godfrey Gruesome, too.

The asylum was honeycombed with secret passages, and she knew the secret; consequently she had been able to enter the dungeon, and liberate the man from cell and manacles.

"Free—both of them—free!" gurgled the doctor, in horror. Then he glanced at the ghastly face of his wife, with increasing alarm, and demanded of Marie, in hoarse tones:

"What is the matter with your mistress, woman?"

"Oh, Mon Dieu! She ver' seek vas taken, vile you away to ze ceety vos, monsieur. I lose mine leetle notebook, an' zere eez Rureek an' ze mans, both get free!" replied Marie.

The doctor glanced from one to the other, like a cornered animal that knows it must fight hard for freedom.

Godfrey Gruesome stepped into the room, and locking the door on the inside, he put the key in his pocket.

Seeing this the madhouse keeper's fear increased.

"Father!" cried Ruric, in glad tones. "Oh! You are free!"

"Ay, my boy," replied Godfrey Gruesome, fixing a baleful glance upon the doctor, "and I have got that viper just where I want him, too! We will have an accounting now!"

"In heaven's name," cried the sick woman, starting up in bed, frantically, "do not fight in here!"

Godfrey Gruesome cast a look of contempt at her.

She looked dreadful—her eyes were bloodshot, her face drawn and haggard, as if from excessive suffering, her hair sadly disarranged, and her white night-dress was torn.

"As for you," said Gruesome, in bitter tones of reproach, "I see you are sick, and unfit to witness a scene of violence. But let me tell you, madam, that you deserve but little compassion of me, after not only denying I am your rightful husband, but also for linking your life with that of this inhuman fiend, well knowing I was alive and near you."

"Spare her now, father!" reproved Ruric, sympathetically, as he hurried to the bedside, and flung his arm around the sick woman's neck. "She is very, very ill, aren't you, my poor mother? Oh, but how you have changed in one night!"

"My darling son!" sobbed the weeping woman, as she kissed Ruric again and again. "Oh, I feel so distressed—so forlorn!"

"Well," interposed the doctor, with great calmness, as he faced Godfrey Gruesome, "how did you get free, may I ask?"

"That is none of your business!" sharply replied the other. "Let it suffice that I am out of your power, and that our hour of reckoning has arrived."

"Indeed!" sneered the physician.

"We are on equal footing now," proceeded Gruesome, forcibly, "and I demand to know what villainy you were scheming that led you to marry my wife?"

"Oh! You do, eh? Then I shall tell you. But before I do so I advise you to return to your cell in the dungeon, for it does not suit my plans to have you running around here loose, as you might cause me some trouble."

He pointed at the door.

But maddened at him as Gruesome was, he shouted:

"No! no! Never again shall you imprison me. Speak! Confess, you fiend, or I will throttle you where you stand!"

In a fury, he sprang at the doctor, his fingers working convulsively, and a terrible look in his eyes.

But just as he arrived within a yard of Caleb Crane, the rascal whipped a revolver from his hip-pocket and pointed it directly in Gruesome's face!

Uttering a cry of consternation, the man halted suddenly.

Then he threw up his arms and recoiled a step.

A low, mocking laugh peeled from the doctor's lips.

"Startled, eh?" he chuckled. "I thought so! Now produce that key and open the door, do you hear? Open the door and march ahead of me back to your cell! March in double-quick time, too, or by the powers I'll fire at you!"

A gasping cry escaped Gruesome's lips.

"Defeated!" groaned he, in despair.

Looking down the muzzle of that grim revolver was far from pleasant, as the doctor kept it poked in his face only a few feet from his brain, and the shrewd, determined little wretch had his finger upon the trigger.

"Defeated? Well, now, I should say so," acquiesced Crane, with a sarcastic smile. "You are as completely in my power now as if safe in your cell, my boy. That is very evident. Unlock the door, I say, and travel! I wouldn't hesitate an instant to fire at you, and to tell the truth you'd be far better off in your coffin just now than intruding here to mar the tranquillity of my mind."

Godfrey Gruesome stared sullenly at him. His gaze wandered over to Ruric and his mother, and then his hands dropped to his side as a dejected look stole over his face.

"I am at your mercy, unarmed," he replied in a frenzy of excitement, "but you shall not consign me to that tomb without a struggle, you cur!"

And snatching up a chair from the floor, he raised it over his head to hurl it at his enemy.

Before he could fling it, though, there sounded a sharp report; but as Ruric knocked the doctor's arm aside from in back of him, Crane's aim was spoiled.

The bullet flew wide of its mark, the doctor uttered an ejaculation of anger, both the women screamed, and as Ruric was behind the doctor, his father dared not hurl the chair for fear of hitting the boy by accident.

He lowered it, and as the physician turned upon Ruric for interfering the boy grappled him, and endeavored to wrench the weapon from his hands.

In an instant they were struggling on the floor.

Godfrey Gruesome ran to his son's assistance.

They both fell upon the doctor on the floor, and a terrific fight ensued, just as a loud bang came at the door, delivered by the keepers, who had been brought to the spot by the pistol shot.

Marie ran to the door and told them to burst it in, as the doctor was getting killed; while the sick woman in the bed covered her face with her trembling hands to shut out the sight of the struggle from her view.

There came a crash as the lock was burst open.

In rushed Bill and Hank, two of the keepers.

One glance showed them the state of affairs in the room.

They rushed up to the struggling trio, and lending their aid to the doctor, while one dragged Ruric aside, the other caught hold of Godfrey Gruesome.

In a minute more Ruric and his father were overcome and dragged out of the room.

The boy was taken, struggling, back to his cell, and his father was pounded and kicked into a state of insensibility, and dragged down in the dungeon again!

Their liberty had not availed them in the least, and with heavy hearts and tortured minds they were left locked up, to sadly meditate over their misfortune, while the doctor returned to his wife's room.

Before he entered the room the cook ran up to him, and told him that the woman in the dungeon cell No. 4 had been given her drugged breakfast by the negro, as the doctor, the night before, had ordered.

"She had eaten," said the cook, "all the while demanding to see the doctor, and declaring, in a raving way, that she was the victim of a plot—then she seemed to become as mad as a March hare."

"My little decoction works like a charm," chuckled the doctor, as he entered his wife's room, "and I shall take care to keep her well dosed with the drug so she will have no more lucid intervals!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOCTOR'S WIFE.

Upon the bed, moaning as if in pain, the sick woman lay when the doctor entered, and the French woman was doing her best to comfort her mistress.

"What is the matter with you, my dear?" he asked, as he sat down upon the edge of the bed and seizing her wrists, felt of her pulse.

"Oh, I am completely unnerved from all this excitement," replied the lady, in tremulous tones.

"It was a great strain upon you," said Crane, and then he looked at her face and her hands in a curious manner, and added: "But, by Jove, I never saw a person change so in one night as you have done. It is startling. You look frightful. Indeed, one would suppose you had been ill a month, you are so altered."

"You know how nervous I am, Caleb," said the lady, as she nervously watched the doctor.

"That is true. And your disordered hair——"

"Oh! do not touch my head—it is splitting—and you would drive me wild if you lay a finger upon me!" she cried, shudderingly, as she drew back from him.

The doctor was very much perplexed, and fixed his yellow eyes upon her uneasily for an instant.

"What you require is a little stimulant," said he, arising to his feet: "perfect quietness and rest for a few days. Then you will come around all right, by Jove! The haggard look will leave your face and you will become yourself once more."

"Yes, yes," gasped the lady, eagerly.

"In fact, I will leave you entirely alone with Marie," continued the doctor: "only to call in occasionally to see how you progress, and will take up my quarters in another room, my love."

"By all means, Caleb," eagerly acquiesced the woman.

"I wonder how Ruric and his father got free?" said Crane.

"Heaven only knows," groaned the lady. "I hope they will

not get out again to frighten me in this manner. I feared our effort to get the boy's money, and all the rest of our plot, was upon the eve of exposure, and that you and I would go to prison for it."

"Oh, have no fears on that score," laughed Crane, "for I have got things fixed so that we cannot fail."

"But if they had managed to escape?" persisted the lady.

"Of course it would have been bad for us. You must try to make that boy tractable in future, for he could ruin us."

"I shall try," said the woman. "And now leave me—I am all unstrung—I want to be left alone."

"An' me, madam?" queried Marie.

"You can go, too. A good sleep will quiet my nerves."

The woman was glad to get away, to hunt for her precious shorthand book, so she bowed and withdrew, accompanied by the physician.

As soon as she was alone, the whole demeanor of the sick woman changed, like a flash.

She sprang from the bed, glided to the floor, bolted it, as the lock was broken, and then went back to the dressing-case, where she deftly arranged her hair, and bound her head around with a bandage that covered her forehead.

Hastily donning a wrapper, which lay upon a chair, she picked up a shawl, and out from its folds a book fell upon the floor.

It was Marie's shorthand diary.

She picked it up, and opening it, she sat down on a chair and began to peruse it, meantime muttering, softly:

"How fortunate I understand phonography! I can learn from this book everything in connection with the plot the doctor has hatched, now, and he will find himself most strangely balked, when he imagines success is assured! I cannot permit this villainy to go on. But he is cunning and unscrupulous to an unusual degree, and would perhaps kill me if he discovers that I play him false. I never yet saw the smartest man, though, who is equal to a woman, when she sets her wits to work to dupe him."

Having mastered the contents of the book, she locked it up in a drawer of the bureau and took the key.

"And now," she muttered, "while I have the chance, I will commence the first step to thwart the doctor. He imagines I am perfectly acquiescent to do as he commands, and to back up his designs. So much the better. When he is finally undeceived, the shock of surprise will demoralize him."

She arose, approached the wainscoted wall, and after an instant spent in searching, she opened the same concealed door in the woodwork through which the mad woman had entered the room the night before.

Swiftly taking a candle from the table she ignited it, entered the dark aperture, closed the door, and found herself in a narrow passage between the walls.

Gliding ahead, the candle dimly lighting up the surrounding darkness, she came to a flight of stairs reeking with dampness, and holding her light aloft, she softly descended.

Reaching another passage, and a second flight of stairs, down she went to the cellar of the building.

She arrived in a vaulted passage of brick, one side being built of stone masonry, and pursuing it a short distance, she came to a pause at a large, flat stone.

There was an iron latch on it, which had become rusted from the dampness, but she lifted it, turned the slab on a pivot, and disclosed the interior of Godfrey Gruesome's cell.

The man lay upon his cot, bound hand and foot, and as the woman stepped into his cell with the light, he arose to a sitting posture, uttering a cry of amazement.

"Hush!" admonished the woman, raising her hand.

"You—here?" he gasped, watching her savagely.

"Ay, to liberate you on certain conditions."

"Name them, woman, name them."

"I will get you out of here if you will leave this asylum and never come near it again until I send for you. Besides this, you must promise not to divulge any of its secrets to a living soul outside of its walls until I give you my permission to do so—will you do it?"

"And leave you—my wife—with the fiend who brought me here! Never! No, no, no! I won't do it! Your effrontery is terribly——"

"Hark! Listen to me, Godfrey Gruesome," interrupted the lady, in low, intense tones. "You are laboring under a great mistake about me. I am not half so wicked as you imagine. Nor do I care for the doctor. On the contrary, I loathe, hate and despise him. But he has instituted a vile plot to cheat me and my boy out of our rights. I must remain here until I discover all the details of his villainy. Then I will expose him and see that he is put in a much-deserved prison. Now you

understand my motive and know why I want no interference in the counterplot I am forming to thwart our mutual enemy. Do you consent?"

Godfrey Gruesome was astounded at hearing this.

"Why," he stammered, "I thought you loved him, and was a party to the infamy of imprisoning me here?"

"If such was the case, would I now try to liberate you?"

"But you repudiated me. You denied that I was your husband—you swore that you did not know me, although I have not changed a trifle in eleven years."

"Did I?" queried the woman, with a singular smile. "Well, let us not speak of by-gones just now. You will understand the case better when I unmask Caleb Crane. Go to the Irvingdale Arms and live. I will supply you with money until I send for you. Once I can prove a clear case against the detectable doctor his downfall is certain, your restoration as my husband will follow and you will be amazed at all you will then learn. Pray, do not refuse to believe me."

"Then I have misunderstood you?"

"Greatly. I love you yet, dearly, Godfrey. Consent! Consent!"

"Then I will do as you say. But if within a reasonable time I do not have a lucid explanation of this mysterious affair, I will return with the police and have this place pulled to pieces."

She found a penknife in his pocket, cut his bonds, and as she bade him follow her, she added, with a faint smile:

"You see, I have remembered about the secret passages in this old revolutionary building, you once told me of, and by exploring them, I have learned all about them, and turned them to good account."

They could hear the wild raving of the unlucky woman who was confined in cell No. 4, across the corridor, as they entered the hidden passage, reclosed the door and softly went upstairs.

Upon reaching the lady's apartment and closing the panel-door, she was just about to show him how he could escape from the building by a back staircase to the yard, when there came an impatient rapping at the door, and the doctor's voice crying:

"Open the door and let me in! Do you hear!"

"Ah!" muttered the startled woman. "The doctor!"

"Where can I hide?" panted her husband, gazing wildly around.

The doctor had grown impatient, as he had been there knocking since the lady first left the room, and putting his shoulder against the door he burst it open and hurried in.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN IN THE CLOSET.

Dr. Crane entered the room with an angry scowl upon his face, and glanced around.

His wife had been too quick for him.

She lay in bed, covered up to the neck, apparently asleep, and in the closet, peering out through a crack, was Godfrey Gruesome.

Not a second had they lost in concealing themselves.

"By Jove! I've been knocking for five minutes," fumed the doctor. "The door was locked, or bolted, rather, as I see my men broke the lock getting in, and—Hello! Asleep, by Jove!"

The little wretch seized the woman by the arm and shook her.

She started, laid back, and held the covers tightly about her so he could not see that she had on her wrapper, and opening her eyes, she inquired, pettishly:

"Why did you disturb me from my nap?"

"I want to speak to you," growled the doctor. "I've set the boy at liberty. It won't do to imprison him. He might circulate ugly rumors about me. I want you to talk to him immediately; impress upon his mind the necessity of remaining perfectly still about all he hears and sees here—by Jove! and once he is obedient, we are safe to finish up this job. You are the only one who can influence him. He hates me like poison. Can't you do it?"

"Certainly, Caleb, if you so desire," replied the lady, in faint tones, "although I wish you had left it until I felt better. Of course, we must protect ourselves, and I will do all in my power to aid you."

"Good! I dislike to leave things until the last moment. When he is perfectly acquiescent, we must get rid of Marie. She knows too much already for our safety. I'll very quietly ship her back to France on board a vessel which will probably take part of its cargo at the Irvingdale dock this week. As soon as she is out of the way——"

"Ma foi! How kind of monsieur," interjected Marie's voice. She entered the door outside of which she had been crouching and listening, as was her custom, to all the doctor said. "Thunder!" gasped the doctor, arising aghast. "You!"

"Me, par bleu!" acquiesced Marie, with a sneer; "an' by gar, monsieur, I sink zat you meek ze grarn meesteck ven you geet rid of me so ver' easy."

His perfidy to his accomplice exposed, the doctor looked dangerous for an instant, but he quelled the wicked feeling by an effort, assumed a bland smile, and said, sweetly:

"Ah, Marie, you goose, I see my plan succeeded. Knowing how you spy upon me, and having something confidential to say to your mistress, I wanted to find out whether you were around or not, and shrewdly tried the proper trick to bring you to light. Gif rid of you? Nonsense! You know better than to dream that I contemplate such a thing. You are too valuable an accessory to me."

A scornful smile flitted over the French woman's dark face, and a dangerous light leaped to her jet-black eyes.

She did not believe the plausible excuse the doctor manufactured on the spur of the moment, and took no pains to hide her skepticism.

"Monsieur, you lie!" said she, pointedly.

"Oh," said Crane, with a disagreeable laugh. "I see you do not believe me. I will have to talk to you, it is very evident, in the privacy of my office. Now, run away—do. I want to speak to your mistress privately."

He flourished his hand toward the door.

Marie did not budge, however.

She resented being summarily disposed of like so much chaff before the wind, and said, in mortified tones:

"Go on! Par Dieu! you navair have no secret from me."

At the very juncture when it seemed as if a bitter quarrel between the two would ensue, the keeper, Hank, ran unceremoniously into the room.

"Ther man wot was in No. 7 is garn ag'in!" he exclaimed.

"Gone!" gasped the startled doctor, turning deathly pale.

"I jist diskivered his cell empty, his cut bonds a-lyin' on ther floor, an' ther cell locked up on ther outside, sir," proceeded Hank.

"The deuce! What strange mystery is this?" groaned Crane.

"It's the Old Boy's own work, I'm a-thinkin'!" said Hank.

"I must go and see," muttered the doctor. "Go down again, Hank. I will follow you in a moment."

The man hurried out, and Crane turned to Marie:

"You must remain here until I return," said he.

"No, no, monsieur. I do not weesh zat you plays me some evilness, sair. I go immediate from 'ere to ze town. You break ze faith with me, sair. You weesh zat you cheat me of ze money you promise. But sacre tonnerre, I veel 'ave not ze least malrey veeth you. I go to Airvingdale, an' zere I veel tell all about you zat I do know."

A look of ungovernable fury crossed the doctor's smooth face, and he sprang toward her and seized her, crying:

"Traitor! Betray me, would you! But I shall not give you the chance! I have no time now to waste talking to you, and I will lock you in this closet until I return!"

The woman in the bed began to tremble.

If the doctor opened the closet door he would see Godfrey Gruesome hidden in there, and recapture him, suspect her of treachery and wreak a summary vengeance on all of them.

A cold perspiration burst out upon her face.

Marie uttered a shriek as the doctor caught hold of her and began to struggle violently to get away from him.

The emotions of the man in the closet were beyond description, but he made not the least sound.

"My goodness!" muttered the sick woman, in dismay, "what shall I do? I fear we are lost. But I must not lie inactive here. I must do something to prevent exposure."

Marie was fighting the doctor hard.

But her strength was no match for his.

He soon got a firm clutch upon her, and slowly but surely dragged her over to the closet door, which stood ajar.

His hand clutched the knob to fling it open.

The woman could stand her intense anxiety no longer.

Springing from the bed, she tore off the counterpane and glided up behind the doctor as he opened the door.

At the same juncture she flung the bed-cover over his head.

He uttered a cry of rage and amazement, but retained his clutch upon the French woman, who was yet struggling.

Out of the closet glided Gruesome, while the doctor struggled with his disengaged hand to tear the cloth off his head, and diving between Crane's spread legs, Gruesome gave him a shove from the rear that sent the physician and the French girl headforemost into the closet.

Crane uttered a bellow of rage, and the panting Gruesome slammed the door shut and made a dash for the rear stair casement at which his frightened wife pointed silently.

Hardly had he vanished, when the doctor emerged from the closet so suddenly as to collide with his wife, and both fell to the floor just as Ruric came in the hall door, and Marie followed the doctor out into the room.

Ruric's mother arose to her feet, and rushed past the boy out into the hall. But her son saw her.

"Haunted! haunted! haunted!" he cried, hollowly, pointing after her.

She was the veritable mad woman he had seen before, for her head was shorn and the false hair she had just worn was clutched in her hand, as it had come off when she fell, despite the bandage with which it had been fastened on.

CHAPTER XV.

MARIE JOINS THE ENEMY.

Having been liberated from his cell by the doctor, Ruric had just entered his mother's room in time to see his father escape from the closet; the physician enveloped in the counterpane, clutching Marie, got shoved in in Gruesome's stead, and his mother run out into the hall.

One glance showed the boy that the hair she held in her hand was false, and that now her head was bared of it, by losing the bandage she had worn when the doctor knocked her over, her own hair was shorn close.

The doctor had not seen it, though, for he was very much confused by the woman having flung the bed-cover over his head, so her husband could get out of the closet unseen, and escape by the back staircase to the yard.

Marie made a run for the door to get out, but as the doctor feared she would keep her threat to expose his plot to the authorities, he ran after and caught her.

"Marie! Marie!" he gasped. "Do not be a fool! I was only jesting when I told my wife I would send you back to France on a ship. You are too valuable an assistant——"

"No, no, monsieur, I not believe you, sair!" she cried.

But he held on to her tightly.

Marie had seen what her mistress did, and beheld Gruesome's escape; but she was so angry over the doctor's admission of treachery, which she overheard, that she did not intend to tell him anything about it.

She had not seen her mistress' shorn head, though, only having had time to see her disappearing out the door, hear Ruric cry out that he was haunted, and see the boy hurry into the hall after his mother.

"I tell you, you are mistaken!" shouted Crane, angrily.

"Vell," said the woman, suddenly struck with the idea to humor him and make her escape while he was off his guard.

"Zen you promise me by ze oath zat you veel not do zat, sair?"

"Why, of course," said Crane, seeing her apparently relenting.

"Zen, monsieur, I believe you."

"Will you behave yourself now?"

"Sairtainly, but no more such threats, par bleu!"

"No—no. There is a sensible woman. Here—here are fifty dollars," said Crane, giving her the specified amount eagerly.

"Don't be so rampageous in future. Stay here, will you, for I must hurry down to cell No. 7 and find out how the prisoner cut his bonds and made his escape without even leaving the door of his cell unlocked on the outside, as Hank just said he did."

"I stay here, monsieur."

"Who flung that counterpane over my head?"

"Mastair Rureek, sair. He sink zat you veesh to keel me."

"Where has his mother gone?"

"Ven ve struggle, sair, she take ze ight an' run out een ze hall."

"Then bring her back to bed, or she may be taken very sick."

"Yais, monsieur. Ze poor, poor lady, mon dieu!"

"I will have that broken lock and bolt repaired, so she can lock herself in here after this, undisturbed."

And so saying, Caleb Crane hurried out in the hall.

Neither Ruric nor his mother were visible anywhere, and the doctor hurried down to the dungeon, to see for himself how truly Hank spoke, his mind tortured by a thousand fears, in the meantime.

But he had no doubt Ruric would be warned by his mother to act diplomatically to keep matters concerning Godfrey Gruesome a dead secret, at least for a while.

When he reached cell No. 7 in the dungeon, there stood Hank, but, as the man said, the cell was empty, Godfrey

Gruesome's bonds lay upon the floor, evidently cut, and the man was gone.

While the doctor was wondering at the man's mysterious escape, the mad woman in cell No. 4 was glaring out through the iron-barred door, her closely cropped head lending her a most hideous aspect, as she kept yelling at him.

In the meantime Ruric saw his mother run into an empty room at the end of the hall, and he pursued her.

When he got in she stood by the window, as calm and unconcerned as if nothing had occurred.

The hair on her head was evidently undisturbed, the towel was bandaged around her forehead, and she stood glancing out the window in a pensive attitude.

"Mother!" gasped the bewildered boy, pausing in the middle of the apartment. "Mother, in heaven's name, explain this dreadful mystery, or I shall go mad."

"What do you mean, Ruric?" asked the lady, calmly.

"Have you a double, are you possessed of infernal powers, are you a human being or am I indeed mad?"

"My son," said the woman, in tones of sorrow, "you are sane, and I am not endowed with supernatural power——"

"But the queer way you appear to me——"

"Is nothing very strange, as you will learn."

"Then let me implore you again to reveal the truth."

"Not yet, Ruric, not yet," replied his mother, with a yearning look in her gentle eyes. "Have patience, my son. Do not torture your mind with the mystery of this terrible madhouse, for its secrets are of a kind that you cannot fathom——"

"But how is it that you at one moment appear to me the incarnation of a tender, loving mother, and next you are a most horrible looking, crazed creature—seen in two places at the same time; one moment having hardly any hair upon your head, the next instant having a luxuriant growth—sometimes repelling me, then again loving me tenderly."

"Ruric, you will soon learn all. Let this suffice. I have been playing a double character to Doctor Crane. He is a villain, and in order to baffle his evil designs, and learn what they are, I am obliged to do as I am doing. It is all for your interest I do it, and the end is fast approaching when I may have him brought to the bar of justice."

"Ah! Then there is some trickery in all these goings on?"

"Certainly, and yet there is a good deal of truth, too."

"Well, if you will not explain now, tell me how I can aid you."

"With all my heart. Conciliate the doctor, offer to keep his secrets, and act as if you wanted to befriend him, for my sake. That will blind him to my motives, and let me work without fear of being balked in a design I have formed."

"I shall do as you say. But my father?"

"He is free. It was I who liberated him!" she cried, softly.

"Ah! That is a revelation to me. It proves your truth."

"Hark! Some one is coming, Ruric."

She held up her finger, enjoining silence, and both listened.

The next moment the door opened and Marie entered.

The French woman glanced curiously at her mistress.

"Mon dieu!" she exclaimed. "So you are 'ere, eh?"

"Come in and close the door. I want to speak to you," said Ruric's mother, sternly. "I want no trifling, either."

"Sairtainly, madam," said the woman, complying.

"You saw all that passed in my room?" questioned the lady.

"Everysing, madam. You gief ze prisonair hees leebairty."

"True. And you are going to desert the doctor, eh?"

"He ees von rascals, affair all I do for heem, to plot zat 'e send me away, to geet reed of me."

"It certainly was mean of him. But you must not go away."

"Ah, madam, I value my life too mooch to remain here."

"He promised you five thousand dollars, didn't he? Well, he will not give it to you. If you will join me—aid me in my plans. I shall see that you get the amount when he is defeated. Mark me, he will injure you yet, if you give him the chance. As my ally, you will fare better."

The French woman's black eyes sparkled.

She loved intrigue, as most all her nation do.

Seeing a chance to get the money Crane threatened to swindle her out of, and the opportunity to retaliate on him, she was not long in assenting to join the lady's cause.

A plan of action was then improvised, and the trio hurried back to the lady's bedroom, to avoid being caught plotting by the little doctor, whom they heard ascending the stairs.

Crane was very much excited over the (to him) mysterious disappearance of Godfrey Gruesome, and hurried into the bedroom.

Marie and Ruric had gotten out of sight, by retreating into the French woman's sleeping apartment, adjoining, and the

boy's mother had gone to bed again before the physician entered.

Crane approached the bed, and while Ruric and Marie in the room listened they heard him say:

"My dear, the man is gone, by Jove, and once he informs the authorities of what I did to him I may be arrested."

"What can we do?" queried the lady.

"Rapid work alone can save us. I got another paper signed by the mad woman giving me power of attorney. I'll hear from Bings soon."

"You gave the lawyer the paper, then?"

"Yes. And we will soon have your father's fortune now."

"My father's fortune? Ah! So that is the game?"

"Yes, of course. You know. I told you all about it. And once I am appointed Ruric's guardian I'll make a veritable lunatic of the boy, never fear!"

The listening boy shuddered at this threat. It was the second time the physician said he would do it.

"Make a maniac of him?" queried the woman. "How?"

"Why, the same way I turned his brain once before. You know what effect the medicine has on the woman whom I've got safely locked up in cell No. 4. She was raving dreadfully a few minutes ago, as I had another dose, stronger, if possible, put in her food. I can give the boy some of it once the money is in my hands, and lock him in a cell, where he will be safe enough till he dies."

"What is the medicine? Have you got any of it here?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, drawing the vial from his pocket and handing it to her. "That is the stuff! It is an ingenious mixture of chloral hydrate, cocculus Indicus, atropa belladonna and dhatoora. Keep the vial here for future use."

"I shall," said the lady, with a look of grim satisfaction.

"Have you anything to advise about Gruesome?"

"I do not know what to say, Caleb. We must wait until we see what steps he will take."

"A fine state of uncertainty, by Jove!" growled Crane, uneasily.

His anxiety seemed to please the lady, for an exultant look of satisfaction crossed her face as she covertly watched him.

The doctor pondered a moment, then he added:

"I am going away to the city. This suspense will drive me wild. If Gruesome informs the police they will raid my house; but if I am not here they can do me no harm. You can apprise me if anything happens by telegraphing to the D— Hotel. Should the man not do me any injury I will return."

"Remain at least until to-night."

"No; I will go at once. I cannot stand this waiting, and wondering what fatality is going to occur to me."

"Very well, Caleb."

The doctor then kissed her good-by, gave her some minor instructions, and donning his hat, he went away.

Marie and Ruric then entered the room.

They overheard all that was uttered, and the trio seemed glad that the doctor had gone as he did.

The day passed uneventfully by, save that Ruric's mother had a long, earnest conversation with Marie, gave the girl her shorthand book back, and then Ruric was sent to the city with a note from his mother to a prominent lawyer.

When night fell the lady attired herself, put a shawl over her head and stole out of the building and across the yard.

Approaching the tool-house, she went between the fence and the tiny building, drew a small stone from the foundation, and out of the aperture thus made she pulled the paper which had been signed on the night the madhouse first contained Ruric's mother.

At the same juncture the door of the tool-house was cautiously opened and the physician thrust out his head, peered around the edge of the building and saw her kneeling on the ground.

He had not gone to the city at once, wishing to remain upon the premises until nightfall, unbeknown to any one, and see for himself what might transpire.

He was evidently astonished to see the lady there, and more so upon observing that the paper she clutched in her hand was the same one stolen from his pocket on the night Marie's bed was set afire.

"At last!" muttered the lady, trembling with excitement. "I can bring this document to some account now to defeat him!"

The doctor looked amazed, crept out and up behind her. Reaching over her shoulder, he snatched the paper away.

"This is mine!" he exclaimed, pocketing it, while the lady sprang to her feet, uttering a startled cry, "and I want you, madam, to tell me how it came hidden here, and how you knew just where to come to look for it, by Jove!"

CHAPTER XVI.

BEDLAM BREAKS LOOSE.

Caught in the act of unearthing the paper, to sign which the mother of Ruric Gruesome had been maddened by the doctor, the lady became overwhelmed with confusion.

The doctor stood eyeing her distrustfully, then continued: "This is most singular. No one but the mad woman knew where this document was hidden, yet you came here as if you knew all about it. Moreover, I want to know into what account you can now bring the paper, and who it is you are threatening to defeat?"

The lady's agitation increased, and she stammered:

"I thought you went to the city?"

"But I didn't, by Jove, nor has any one come to arrest me."

"True! You startled me dreadfully by your sudden appearance. That is why I am so agitated. Why did you do it?"

"Bosh! Why don't you answer my questions?"

"I have been questioning the mad woman—she told me where she hid the paper. I meant I could bring the paper to some account by handing it over to you, Caleb, to defeat any resistance on the part of the boy, so that our success could be assured."

"Oh," said the doctor, his face clearing, "I see! But you must be much enter than I am, managing to find out where the woman hid the paper. I even went to the extreme of torturing her to wring a confession of truth from her stubborn lips, but she would not admit anything to me."

"Ah, a woman's tact is much shrewder than a man's."

"That is so. I am glad you succeeded. This paper might have been the exposure of me. I'll destroy it now so that it will not avail any one."

And so saying, he drew it from his pocket and tore it to fragments, scattering them on the summer wind.

"Then you are not going to the city?" queried the lady.

"No. I have no fear, since Gruesome has made no move yet to get me into hot water. The gateman has closed up the grounds, and if any one comes he can inform me in plenty time to get away by the river."

"Then I will return to the house."

"By all means. You are ill, and the night air is poisonous. I will go at once and apprise the gateman what to do."

The lady nodded, they separated, and while the doctor went down the graveled path, Ruric's mother returned to the asylum.

"Defeated!" she muttered as she went in. "Sure of proof of his villainy as I was, I was most unexpectedly thwarted. But he does not suspect me of being opposed to him, nor does he know that Marie has confessed all, and joined issues with me. Within but a short time he will suddenly find himself under arrest. I hope Ruric saw the attorney I wrote to. He will go to Lawyer Bings, and straighten out matters in New York considerably."

Going upstairs, she met the boy in the hall.

"Ah, mother," said he, "I have been looking for you."

"Have you seen the man I sent you to?"

"Yes, indeed."

"What did he say?"

"That we are victims of a conspiracy, and that by this time to-morrow he and Benjamin Bings will have a conversation that will result in Caleb Crane's defeat."

"Good! Now run to your room. The doctor is coming."

As she said this she ran into her own apartment and locked the door, as the lock had been repaired that day.

The doctor was to take up his quarters in another part of the house, pending her recovery, so she had no fear of being bothered by him just then.

The boy heard her lock the door, which, besides the exit leading to the back stairway, was the only means of getting out of the room, and then he walked away toward his own room. He had just passed the heard of the stairs when he heard some one coming up.

Pausing and glancing over the balustrade, he saw the dim, shadowy figure of a woman softly ascending.

There was something peculiar about her that caused the boy to stop and watch her until she reached the top.

The hall was dimly lit up, and all objects were but imperfectly to be seen; yet Ruric could distinguish her figure faintly.

She wore a tight-fitting dress and waist, her sleeves were rolled up to the elbows, and a cape was thrown over her head.

"Who can she be, I wonder?" muttered the boy.

Before he could discover, the woman reached the head of the staircase, and then, like a flash, she whizzed through the hall and dodged into one of the lunatic wards.

"How peculiar!" mused Ruric, staring after her.

He glanced up and down, but no one was in sight.

His mother's door was shut, and he heard her talking to Marie; then he glided through the hall.

"I'll follow that woman," he muttered, "and see where she goes to. If I could only have seen her face I might have discovered whether she was one of the servants or not."

Upon reaching the entrance to the ward, he saw the woman's figure more vaguely than ever, as there was not a light to illuminate the broad passage.

She was flitting along like a shadow, pausing here and there for an instant on the right-hand side, and then on she would go again a few steps further.

Within a few moments she vanished at the extremity of the passage, making scarcely any noise.

The doctor's apartment was at the end of the ward—the same room in which Marie had nearly been burnt to death—but Caleb Crane had not yet come upstairs.

For an instant Ruric hesitated about proceeding any further.

"What is the use?" he muttered. "She must have been a servant gone in to make up the doctor's bed. But she acted so singularly as to arouse my suspicions."

At this juncture Ruric heard footsteps in the hall behind him.

Glancing around, he saw the doctor coming up the stairs.

A moment later Crane approached him.

"Hello!" said he, staring at the boy. "What are you doing here?"

"Ah—the doctor!" exclaimed Ruric. "I'm glad you have come in."

"Why, what is the matter?"

Ruric explained to him about the mysterious woman.

"Can she be one of the servants, sir?" he asked, in conclusion.

"Why, no, by Joye! My room is locked up and I've got the key."

"Then who was she?"

"I have no female patients, so she must be a servant——"

"Hark!" suddenly interrupted Ruric. "What is that?"

There sounded a sharp click! at the end of the corridor.

The doctor started, his face turning very pale.

"It sounds like one of the spring locks on the cell doors," said he. "They all open on the outside."

"Then you think——"

"One of the cells was just opened!"

"Hush! There goes another!" muttered Ruric.

There sounded another click and then another.

Just then the figure of the woman loomed up in view, coming down the ward on the left-hand side, with that strange motion; and with every pause she made there sounded the noise of a spring lock opening.

The madhouse keeper looked very uneasy, and lighting a match he ignited a lamp hanging on the wall.

A dull glow was thrown out on the corridor.

Its rays revealed the face and figure of the mysterious woman, and a simultaneous cry burst from Ruric and the doctor.

"My mother!" shouted Ruric, in bewilderment.

He reeled back and glared at the woman with bulging eyes. She heard him, and started forward a step, her dress fluttering, her hands raised to her shorn head and a wild, maniacal light appearing in her startled eyes.

The boy's amazement was justifiable, as he had seen his mother enter her room and lock the door.

Indeed, when he first started in pursuit of this strange creature he heard his mother in her apartment talking to Marie Montmedy in distinct tones.

The lady could not have emerged from her room without the boy seeing her, and yet here before him was the living semblance of that mad being who had so often puzzled him before in the same dress and cloak, her hair cropped short, and the same terrible expression of madness upon her face!

"She said she had no supernatural powers!" raved the boy, "and yet if this is natural the whole world must have reversed the order of things! She is my mother, or I am, as I have claimed before, a haunted boy!"

"Ruric, my son!" yelled the mad creature, holding out her arms.

"Thunder!" hissed the doctor. "She has escaped from cell No. 4!"

"Oh!" groaned Ruric, rushing up to her. "Speak—tell me—is this a part of your masquerade or is it a reality?"

"Ho! ho! ho! Listen to him rave!" shouted the woman, as she recoiled a step. "He is mad, mad, mad! Ho! ho! ho!"

"You shall speak!" desperately shouted the boy. "I'll make you!"

"She has opened nearly all the cells!" interrupted Crane, as the lamplight revealed to his startled glance what the unfortunate woman had done. "The lunatics will all get out! Run for the keepers, Ruric—quick!"

The boy was amazed to hear this startling news.

A thrill of dismay darted through his nerves.

But before he could move a step one of the doors was stealthily pushed open behind the doctor, and a patient stole out into the corridor, with the noiseless tread of a cat.

The voices in the ward roused the others to a pitch of fury.

No sooner had the first one emerged, when the door opposite crashed open, and with a bound the inmate of the cell jumped out, uttering a yell that made Ruric and the doctor start.

This was almost a signal for the others, for they took the initiative, and came pouring out of the cells on both tiers with the most dreadful cries and exclamations.

"All are escaping!" shouted Ruric.

"Run for your life and summon the keepers!" shouted Crane.

The boy started to obey, but ere he had taken a step three of the most ferocious-looking maniacs sprang in his path.

He could not advance a step now without getting them out of his way, and it brought him to a pause.

"We are shut off from the main hall!" he cried.

"To remain here is certain death!" gasped the doctor.

"I cannot help it. Get these fellows out of my way."

The doctor started to do so, but several more, who were in close proximity to him, caught hold of his coat.

He aimed a vicious blow at them, and as it caught one and knocked him down the others retreated, uttering cries of anger and affright, and he followed up this advantage.

Running toward the lunatics who barred Ruric's exit, he drove them back, and told the boy to hurry away.

Before Ruric could advance a step, though, the men behind them rushed up, and both the boy and the doctor were obliged to back up against an open cell door and face them with a steady, unflinching stare.

They sullenly and defiantly returned the glance for a moment; then they were forced to drop their gaze and retreat with a sneaking, whipped air, easy victims of stronger wills than their own diseased minds.

The doctor then ran in among them, bidding the boy to follow.

A hand clutched Ruric's arm as he attempted to do so.

Glancing around he saw the woman whom he imagined was his mother.

She had a tenacious grip on his arm, and was dragging him forcibly toward one of the cell doors.

At the same moment one of the other lunatics set up a howl; one after another joined in with different cries—shouts, expletives and fierce denunciations—and as this noise swelled into a loud, hoarse chorus the place became a veritable Bedlam.

One of the unfortunates, more deft and powerful than the rest, adroitly caught the doctor by the back of the neck, jerked him over upon the floor, and the whole yelling mass fell upon him.

Beneath the entire crowd of struggling lunatics the physician fought with ungovernable fury, all the while calling for help.

In the clutches of the woman, Ruric was suddenly pulled into the cell, the maniac gabbling and raving incoherently all the while, and although he struggled with might and main to get away, the boy's strength was inadequate to accomplish it.

"Mother!" he cried, imploringly, "let me go! Those maniacs out there will kill the doctor! Are you, too, mad?"

"Let you go? Never!" she shrieked. "Do you know what I want?"

A cold shudder of horror pervaded him when he met her cruel glance.

"No!" he panted. "You are a maniac! Let go of me!"

"Then I'll tell you. It is your life. You aided him to deceive me!" she hissed, in malevolent tones, "and now you will pay for it!"

She flung him upon the floor of the cell, her eyes blazing like live coals of fire, and her long, sinuous fingers closed around his throat with a clutch from which he could not escape.

CHAPTER XVII.

FIGHTING THE MANIACS.

Ruric and Crane were in a dangerous situation, with all the lunatics of the ward out of their cells, surrounding them.

The entire crowd had piled upon the doctor in a heap in the middle of the corridor, and Crane was pounded, kicked and cuffed, squeezed, rolled and crushed unmercifully.

The furious cries of the liberated maniacs, added to the doctor's shouts for help, rang through the asylum with a dreadful sound, the uproar increasing every moment.

Ruric's position was equally as bad, as the mad woman had him down on the floor of the cell, into which she had dragged him, and her hands clutched his throat in a vise-like grip, from which it seemed impossible he could get away, in spite of his most violent exertions.

"Great heaven, my mother wants to kill me," groaned the strangling boy, as he tried to fight her off. "This is awful! Let go of me—do you hear! Let go, I say!"

"Ho! ho! ho! You aided the doctor to deceive me!" cried the woman, fiercely. "You are my enemy. I shall kill you for it! Oh, I know who you are. We shall win the game yet! We shall have your money! You will become a beggar—a beggar—a beggar, you brat!"

"Mother!" gurgled the boy, his face turning purple, his eyes starting from their sockets, and his lips swelling as his spread fingers clutched at the crazed woman. "Oh, how can you do this? You are killing your own son!"

"My son? Oh, ho! Oh, ho! My son? Bah! You are not my son—not my son! I tell you I have no son. You are my enemy—our enemy—the doctor's enemy! Die, you little wretch! Die, will you! Ho! ho! ho!"

She chuckled and laughed immoderately, and her grasp upon Ruric's neck tightened until he could not breathe.

Lights began to dance and flash before his strained vision, a loud, humming noise began to ring in his ears, and everything seemed to assume a double shape.

The horribly contorted face of the mad woman kept growing bigger and bigger, until she looked like a giantess; the evil expression with which she regarded him seemed to be augmented ten-fold, until she looked like an incarnate fiend; and then everything gradually became shadowed and dim.

Ruric's senses were deserting him fast.

Quicker and brighter gleamed the fancied lights before his vision; louder and louder roared the noises in his ears until it swelled to the thunder of booming artillery; bigger and bigger grew the face and form of the crazed woman.

An anguished expression stole over the boy's face, his body convulsively writhed, his spread fingers clutched at the floor, and his limbs began to contract and bend at the joints.

"I am going—going—going!" he moaned.

Upon the verge of losing his senses, he ceased to struggle, and the mad woman drew closer to him, a malignant look upon her evil features, as she keenly contemplated him.

The furious uproar out in the corridor seemed to have increased, and as the ghoulish woman began to jabber to herself there came a figure into the cell with a rush.

It was one of the madmen.

The moment he saw the woman he sprang at her, knocked her over upon the floor, and they began to fight, with the fury of two demons.

Liberated of that strangling clutch upon his windpipe, Ruric began to gasp for breath, the discoloration left his face, and he slowly began to recover his faculties.

The increasing noise out in the hall brought his wits together more rapidly, and as he glanced through the door of the cell he saw that a couple of keepers had arrived upon the scene, attracted there by the loud noise.

They wielded cruel-looking whips in their hands, and having closed the big door at the entrance to the corridor, so that none of the lunatics could escape, they dashed up to the fighting crowd to rescue the doctor from their midst.

Right and left whistled and hummed the lashes, every blow falling upon a madman, sending him screaming with agony to one side, until the crowd was scattered and the doctor free.

Crane then arose to his feet, and securing an extra whip, which one of the keepers brought with him, the little doctor joined the men at beating back his assailants.

Savage at the way they maltreated him, Crane struck many a cruel blow that seared the flesh of its recipient, and the groveling unfortunates rushed aimlessly hither and thither to get out of the way of the stinging lashes.

It was one of the lunatics thus driven away who ran into the cell Ruric occupied, and saved his life just then.

Here and there darted the doctor and the keepers after the flying lunatics, beating them into the different cells, all of which were soon occupied again, locked up and the corridor was cleared once more.

Ruric arose to his feet and walked unsteadily out of the cell, leaving the man and the woman fighting helplessly inside.

"Ah! where have you been?" cried Crane, upon seeing the boy.

"In this cell. The woman is in here fighting an incurable," replied the boy. "She nearly choked me to death just now."

"Go in and separate them," said Crane to the keepers. "Leave the man inside and bring the woman back to cell No. 4 in the dungeon."

"Yes, sir," said Bill, touching his cap.

"Where is Hank?" continued the doctor.

"He went down in the dungeon, ten minutes ago," replied Bill.

"I don't understand how this woman got out, by Jove!"

The two men entered the cell, and after a short struggle with the woman, they made a prisoner of her, and dragged her out into the corridor, while Crane locked the man in.

Ruric glanced keenly at the woman.

"She is certainly my mother," he muttered, doggedly. "I am not mistaken in her. After the trouble in her room, when the doctor was trying to lock Marie in the closet, and the false hair on my mother's head became detached, she was the same as this woman in looks, voice, actions and indeed everything. Yet before I pursued this poor creature I heard my mother's voice in her room, behind my back—before I knew the identity of this mad woman. Oh, what a maddening, maddening mystery!"

The doctor told Ruric to go to bed, and accompanied by Bill and the other keeper, they brought the woman back to the dungeon.

Hank lay on the floor, senseless, the cell door stood open, and after they thrust the screaming and fighting mad woman in the cell and locked her up they carried the unconscious man upstairs to the kitchen and revived him.

He then told them how he had gone to the woman's cell to give her fresh water, when she struck him with the earthen jug, felled him in the corridor, and thus managed to escape.

Ruric watched the men bringing the woman downstairs, and when they vanished from view he turned around to go to his own room for the night, when his mother's room door opened.

Upon the threshold stood Mrs. Gruesome.

Calm, collected, her luxuriant hair neatly arranged, and attired in a very handsome silk wrapper, she beckoned to the boy.

"There she is again!" gasped Ruric, pausing and turning pale.

"What was the cause of all that tumult?" asked the lady.

"Do you mean to tell me," excitedly said the boy, "that you have been in here since I saw you awhile ago?"

"I have not been out of my room, Ruric," replied the lady.

"Where is Marie?" he asked, presently.

"She has retired to bed."

"Can I come in a moment?"

"Why, certainly. But that noise I heard?"

"A lot of maniacs got free. They are recaptured."

The boy entered the room as he said this and closed the door.

The lady glanced at him curiously and saw that he was sulky-looking, and eyed her in a peculiar way, from head to foot, much as if he contemplated doing her some mischief.

She felt alarmed over the boy's peculiar appearance.

"How did they get out?" she asked.

"You liberated them, and then you tried to kill me."

"Me?" echoed his mother, in amazement. "You are mistaken. I have not been out of this room since your return from New York from the attorney's office to which I sent you."

"Are there any female patients here?" asked Ruric.

"The doctor claims to only care for men and boys."

"Then if you are not superhuman, I am not crazy, or something else is not the matter. There must be a crazy woman in this asylum, who is the exact image and counterpart of you, mother."

"Nonsense, Ruric. Do not trouble your head over any strange sights you may see here. I told you once before."

"Well, I am going to satisfy my mind, anyway."

"How do you mean?"

"To see if I am mad; this way."

And so saying, he suddenly seized her hair and drew it off.

She recoiled, uttering a cry of alarm. But Ruric saw that she was the exact counterpart of the crazy woman Crane had brought down to the dungeon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH IS WHICH?

Ruric's mother was taken by surprise and recoiled a step, her hands going up to her head, covering the shorn crown.

In the boy's hands was clutched the false hair she had worn, and he saw that it was nothing but a switch, so deftly arranged as to cover her head after the manner of a wig. But without the bandage she wore to cover the sides and to hold the false hair on her head, she could not have worn it as she had been doing for the past few days, even deceiving the lynx-eyed doctor.

"What did you do that for?" she demanded, angrily.

"I wanted to see if my theory was wrong," replied the boy.

"Give it back to me, instantly!" she exclaimed.

"Certainly; here it is, mother," and he handed back the hair.

The lady walked over to the mirror, and rearranging it upon her head, she turned to Ruric with the remark:

"I don't want you to betray this secret."

"I won't, if you want it kept."

"Should you do so, you will ruin my plans."

"Depend upon me, mother. I am wholly in the dark as to what this strange mystery means, yet I suppose I shall have to see all these perplexing happenings and wait for enlightenment until the proper time comes."

"There is no other way to do, my son."

"I am satisfied, though, of one thing," said Ruric, in gloomy tones, "and that is the fact that you have a double in this asylum. I have always imagined that it was you I saw in two widely separated places within a short time of each occurrence. Now I have proved to my entire satisfaction that I was mistaken. Yet your double at times acted as if she knew I was her son, and called me her boy. Now, see here. I want to test this discovery a little further."

"How do you mean, Ruric?"

"Here is a pencil and a piece of paper. Will you write for me, 'when in the course of human events,' so that I can see if you yet have recovered from the lameness you once complained of, when I asked you to write to my college professors some time ago? Besides that, your chirography, spelling and composition were strangely altered at that time, and not at all like what you were in the habit of sending me while I was away at school."

The boy's mother smiled quietly, and sitting down at a table she inscribed the sentence Ruric dictated.

The boy glanced at it eagerly.

"It is the same as you always wrote," commented he. "The same pretty writing and correct spelling. Now how in the name of goodness is it you could not do this when I asked you once before. I'd like to know, mother?"

"That is something I cannot yet explain to you."

"The reason I wanted to test you," explained the boy, "was because I noticed that the writing on the envelope you sent to the attorney by me was just the same as you always wrote."

"Let us end this matter right here," said the lady. "I do not want you to question me any further. To-morrow or the next day you will find out all you want to know. Now, have patience, and retire to your room. You are absolutely making yourself sick, fretting over all these mysteries."

"Tell me first, do you know where my father is?"

"Yes. At a certain hotel in Irvingdale. Have no fear of him. After he got out of that closet and escaped to the yard by the back entrance to this room, he safely got away, and at present is in concealment."

"Good! I am glad to hear it, mother."

"Did the doctor recapture the mad woman?"

"Yes—and he and the others are bringing her to the dungeon again."

"Did they notice any peculiarity about her?"

"None that I know of. But is Marie true to you?"

"Money makes her true as steel. She has renounced the doctor, made a complete confession to me of all the doctor's villainy, and having been promised an ample reward, she is willing to do all she can to aid me secure the doctor's conviction, as soon as I am ready."

Ruric was obliged to be contented with this much information.

He was mystified over his mother's actions.

Leaving the room, he sought his own apartment, and after retiring, he lay awake fully an hour, mulling the matter over.

"It seems very strange that she should marry the doctor, in the first place," mused he, "well knowing that my father was

alive, when he disclosed his identity, at the now burnt cottage, in the character of Dan. Yet she did it. Then she seemed to be an enemy of mine, too, in some things, in spite of the kind way she treated me after her marriage, for she agreed with Crane to make a maniac of me, so that the doctor could gain possession of my third of the legacy left by James Forrester, her father. But the scene of horror I beheld in the cottage that night—my mother a raving maniac—it seemed all so vivid and real—yet next morning there was not a sign of it—she was home, in her accustomed place as usual, and told me I must have dreamed that I saw her carried here by Marie and Doctor Crane. Yet why is her hair cut short—why does she wear that false hair—who is the maniac woman that is the exact image and double of her in every respect? My mother has some plan maturing to ruin the doctor. Can it be that she only married him to thwart his wicked designs? It must be so. But patience—patience! I may soon learn the truth of the maddening mystery of this infernal madhouse."

The following day broke, rainy and gloomy.

After breakfasting, Ruric saw his mother go to her room, with the vial in her hand containing the strange drug with which Caleb Crane had maddened the woman in the cell No. 4.

The doctor was in his office, preparing some medicine for a patient, and as the four keepers were at breakfast in the kitchen, the boy resolved to go down in the dungeon, to see if the mad woman was really confined there, and to gain a good look at her again, to see if he was mistaken.

With no one around to interfere with him, Ruric took some matches, a candle, and descending to the cellar, he soon reached the cell in which the woman was confined.

She stood at the iron-barred door, and was staring out at him when he paused opposite her.

To Ruric's amazement, he saw that her face and her deportment had lost the madness characterizing her before.

"Ruric!" she exclaimed, eagerly, as soon as she saw who he was. "Oh, Ruric, my son, for pity's sake unfasten the door and let me out of here."

The boy was startled.

Her tones, voice, actions and all were those of his mother!

"Let you out?" he gasped. "No, no! You are a fraud——"

"Ruric, I am your mother. Do you not recognize me?"

"My mother? No, I just left her upstairs."

"Do not be deceived. The woman you have seen is an impostor—a cunning maniac, who looks exactly like me, and who is impersonating me to deceive you all."

"Goodness! how sanely she speaks!" gasped the bewildered boy. "Last night she was a raving lunatic—now she speaks as lucidly as I do! What am I to make of this?"

He stared at the woman and saw that tears were streaming from her eyes.

"If you doubt me," continued the prisoner, plaintively, "grant me one favor. Send the doctor here. One word of conversation with him is all I ask. That will set matters right. I have been made the victim of that mad woman. She has some cruel design in view—probably to kill you all."

"No," said the boy, resolutely shaking his head. "I won't let you out, nor will I apprise the doctor. I admit that you do look like my mother—that you are her exact image, and have her voice and the same actions. But there is some vile roguesy going on here, and I'll soon know the truth."

"Ruric—would you be so blinded—so deceived?" wildly cried the woman. "Look upon my face—watch me closely—can you not see that I am your mother? Oh, boy, boy, do not commit a terrible error and murder me this way. I cannot live in this detestable cell much longer."

"Oh, I make no mistake," said Ruric, calmly. "Last night you were as mad as a March hare—but now you have got a lucid spell. That's the way with most of you. I am not to be deceived, cunning as you are. I am going now."

"No! no! no!" frantically shrieked the unhappy woman, shaking the iron door in a frenzy. "Do not leave me, Ruric—come back! Come back! I will blame you with my dying breath if you do not lend me your aid. Will you—oh, will you help me, Ruric? For heaven sake—I implore you!"

But the boy hurried away determinedly, not knowing that she had regained her senses owing to the effects of the drugs wearing off.

Glancing back, all he could see were her hands thrust out between the bars of the cell door, and hear her calling him back.

Leaving the dungeon with a visible shudder, he entered a room adjoining the doctor's office, and to his surprise he heard Benjamin H. Bings, the lawyer, talking to Caleb Crane. Stealing over to a door the boy listened to hear what was said.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOCTOR'S LITTLE PLAN.

Ruric peeped through the keyhole of the door, and saw the doctor sitting at his desk, while beside him sat the stiff, straight, hollow-eyed lawyer, with his rusty plug hat on, without a smile upon his face.

There was an ugly look in the little doctor's queer, yellow eyes as he watched Mr. Bings, and he was growling:

"I don't like the delay at all, Bings, and I won't put up with it much longer, by Jove—that is all!"

"My Christian friend," observed the lawyer, "as heretofore said, I cannot help it. The second paper you caused to be signed and sworn to before a notary public will give you power of attorney for your second wife and her child, Ruric, the other heir, but I know that the lad is not crazy, as you have just said, and I cannot, as hereinafter will appear, use a false statement."

"You say the boy must act for himself, and that his mother was legally appointed his guardian, eh?"

"True—true, my worthy client."

"Suppose I prove he is incompetent—a raving maniac?"

"If you can do so you could have yourself appointed his legal guardian, as said heretofore. But that would not affect his inheritance in the least. You cannot touch it, my dear sir."

"I can secure my wife's portion for her, though?"

"Doubtless. But can't she secure it herself?"

"Yes, of course, she can."

"Then, my dear sir, she must do so."

"There must be some way, by Jove, to gain control of that part willed to Ruric Gruesome, isn't there?"

"Only his death would leave it to his mother."

"Ha!" exclaimed the doctor.

The tone in which he gave utterance to this word was so sinister as to make the listening Ruric shudder.

"He would kill me, if he dared, in order to rob me," the boy muttered as he peered through the keyhole again.

"Well," said the doctor, "with the power of attorney I can act in behalf of my wife and her son; that is beyond all dispute. But you know my object now. I want to get the boy's portion in my hands, by Jove, and get it I will if there is any possible means."

"The will," said the lawyer, with a dry cough, "is worded so that if the boy is alive he will inherit, as aforesaid, at legal age. In event of his death his mother will inherit the entire fortune. The boy, as the Latin has it, is homo alieni—under a guardian's control. His mother is the guardian, as hereinafter will appear."

"Then his share cannot be touched until he is twenty-one?"

"Not a cent, my Christian friend, not a cent."

"Then there is no need of mentioning him any more?"

"None in the least. Finis coronat opus; the end crowns the work."

This was a disagreeable pill for the doctor to swallow.

It made Ruric smile quietly to himself, though, behind the door.

"When can we finish the settlement?" asked Crane, after a pause.

"To-morrow, as heretofore mentioned, I will begin work. Within a week the entire case will be settled. Expect me here to-morrow with a legal friend. He will bring certain documents to be signed by you, as aforementioned, and you must be present with your wife and her son, your witness, the mentioned Marie Montmedy, and at 3 P. M. you can look for us."

"Good!" said Crane. "I shall look for you, and will be ready."

Here the long, lank Mr. Bings was taken with a very hard fit of coughing, shot up from his seat like a skyrocket, jerked his old plug hat over his eyes by a sudden nod and grasped his neck.

"Remarkable, remarkable!" said he, in amazed tones. "The trachea of humanity when lubricated by certain ardent spirits—"

"Brandy, for instance?" insinuated the doctor, smiling.

"Or whisky," added the lawyer.

He crooked his arm and winked.

The mystic sign was understood.

The doctor produced a bottle and glasses, "hookers" were imbibed, and the lawyer then expressed it his intention to return to New York.

The doctor accompanied him to the door.

When he was gone, Caleb Crane returned to his office, sat down, and Ruric heard him mutter in faintly audible tones:

"So there is no way to get the boy's legacy, excepting by his death. That is very awkward, to be sure. I am not a murderer, but I think that I can kill him for awhile, and yet gain mastery of the situation. Now there is bottle No. 37 in my case, which is equally as efficient as No. 44, with which I turned that woman's brain. It contains a very simple compound, but the effect is monstrously fine as I have frequently tested it. Curare—a fine neurotic paralyzant of the motor nerves, which, when it is introduced under the skin acts like chain-lightning. The patient is to all appearances dead, and in reality not far from it, with the spine and heart paralyzed. Indeed, there is only one way to tide the victim over the effect, and that, too, is a delicate operation, by Jove! Yet I am not afraid to risk using it on the boy."

"Oh, but ain't you?" muttered Ruric, with a grimace.

"It will serve my purpose admirably," went on Crane.

"And I won't submit to it!" muttered Ruric.

"I'll use it to-night," said Crane, "and a coroner's inquest would only reveal the fact that he died from paralysis of the heart, from natural causes, and then I can revive him, and bury a mummy—that is, if I don't actually kill him under the operation, by Jove!"

"The deuce you will!" Ruric thought.

"Then," continued Crane, "I can gain possession of his share of the legacy for my wife, and it will fall into my hands afterward."

"I doubt it!" muttered Ruric, grimly.

A moment later the doctor left his office.

Ruric went out of the room, his mind trouble with misgivings over what he overheard.

"That man would not hesitate at any foul means to carry his point!" thought the boy with a shudder, "and I must beware of him. He won't operate his infernal drugs on me if I can help it."

He went to his mother's room and told her what he overheard the doctor and the lawyer saying, and in conclusion he repeated the soliloquy of Crane, whereat the lady looked startled.

She warned the boy to be careful of what he ate and drank, and told him to look out constantly for an unexpected attack.

The boy went out afterwards and had his supper in Irvingdale. Returning to the asylum, he retired to his room.

It was a pleasant bed-chamber near his mother's apartments, furnished very nicely, having two windows, one door and a closet, in the top of which was a scuttle leading to the roof.

He locked and bolted the door leading to the hall, lit the lamp, undressed, and within an hour he went to bed and fell asleep.

The clock on her mantel chimed the hour of ten.

As the last silvery note of the bell ceased, the closet door was pushed open very cautiously and the doctor glided into the room.

By another scuttle he had gained the roof, crossed it to the one over Ruric's room, and thus gained ingress to the apartment.

Ruric had turned the light of his lamp low, and in the dim and uncertain light, the doctor's figure looked shadowy and obscure.

In one hand he held a small sponge saturated with chloroform, and in the other a tiny vial of curare, and a sharp lancet to puncture the sleeping boy's skin, in order to administer the deadly drug.

Creeping stealthily over to the bedside, he hovered over the boy an instant, and then reached out his hand to place the saturated sponge under Ruric's nostrils.

It touched the boy's face—he awoke with a start, but before the doctor could stop him he sprang out of bed.

"Rascal!" cried Ruric. "So you have come to drug me, have you?"

CHAPTER XX.

PREPARING THE TRAP.

Seeing that his plan to chloroform Ruric and administer the fatal drug to the boy was defeated, Crane uttered a cry of rage.

The sponge dropped from his hand, and he hastily thrust the lance and vial of curare into his pocket.

The open closet door showed Ruric how the man got into the room, for Crane had left the scuttle open.

"He knows what I want to do to him," muttered the doctor, in amazement. "How did he discover it?"

Ruric overheard this remark and replied:

"Yes, I do know that you want to drug me. You want to give me the semblance of death in order to cheat the law out of my inheritance. I'll tell you how I discovered it. You and Mr. Bings were talking over the matter of the fortune in your office while I was in an adjoining room. When the lawyer was gone I overheard your soliloquy covering what you are now contemplating doing. That is how it was."

"Oh!" exclaimed Crane, his queer yellow eyes snapping.

"Now you leave this room!" exclaimed Ruric, pointing at the door.

"If I force the issue the little beggar may create a row," the doctor thought, angrily, "and I can just as well do it some other time. In fact, I'll get that vial from my wife and murder him with some of its contents in his food. Then it will be easier to give him this stuff afterward."

So, without a word to Ruric, and unsuspecting that his wife and Marie were plotting his downfall, he unlocked the door and left the boy's bedroom.

Ruric uttered a sigh of relief when he was gone.

"A good riddance! I just awakened in time," thought he, "and as I'm safe for the rest of the night I'll retire again."

Following this suggestion he went to bed and slept undisturbed until the following morning, when his mother summoned him to her room and gave him a note to deliver.

"Why—it is for my father!" he commented.

"Yes. You will find him at the D—— Hotel, Ruric."

"Have you determined upon anything?"

"I have—you shall discover what it is later on."

Ruric then told his mother what happened the previous night.

"I am in constant danger now," he added, "for if I remain under this roof much longer the doctor will make another effort to get me in trouble."

"Have no fear, my boy, he shall not injure you."

Ruric then left the asylum with the note.

Proceeding to Irvingdale, he went to the hotel and asked for Godfrey Gruesome.

His father was quartered in room No. 5, and the boy was ushered upstairs and admitted.

"Why, Ruric, what brings you here?" was his father's first query.

"My mother sent you this note," said the boy.

With eager, trembling hands, the man took the note, opened the envelope, and read the missive.

A look of intense satisfaction overspread his face.

"At last. At last!" he exclaimed.

"What is it, father?"

"She wants me to call at the asylum this afternoon at three o'clock. This fatal mystery will then be ended."

"Thank heaven!" fervently exclaimed the boy.

Almost maddened as he had been by the strange and perplexing events happening since he left school, it was with intense gratification that he heard this agreeable news from his father.

The mystery of the madhouse was to be explained.

He left his father after giving him an account of all that happened since Godfrey Gruesome made his escape from the closet in his wife's bedroom.

Returning to the asylum, he told his mother what his father said, and saw the doctor drive away in his buggy.

Marie came in with her bonnet and shawl on while the boy was conversing with his mother, and the lady said:

"Well, Marie, have you been to New York?"

"Yais, madam," replied the woman, sitting down.

"You brought the vial the doctor gave me to the lawyer?"

"Zat I deed, madam, an' 'e say zat 'e 'ave ze contents analyzed by one doctaire, to proove vot eet do."

"Then he will call here?"

"No; but Mr. Bings, he come for sure."

"Did he confer with Mr. Crane's lawyer?"

"Oh, yais, an' Mr. Bings ees ver' mooch disgust zat ze doctaire eez such a bad mans."

"Naturally. Ah, such a surprise this will be for Mr. Crane!"

"But, madame, eet eez safe enough for me?"

"You need fear nothing, Marie."

"I 'ope not, madam."

"Give all your evidence and no one will harm you for all you did against me. I have promised you that. Besides, you shall have five thousand dollars when all is ended. Had you trusted the doctor, he would never have paid you the sum he promised. You know how tricky and treacherous he is. He would have cheated you and in the end he would have shipped you out of the country. You know enough against him to secure his imprisonment, and he feared you. Being an unscrupu-

lous man, you know he would hesitate at nothing to secure his own safety."

"True, madam, true," assented the girl. "Eet eez bettair zat I stick to you, an' sen' heem to ze jails."

"You gave the lawyer your shorthand book?"

"I deed; an' eet eez all translate by zees time."

"Then no better proof can be produced. You have a detailed record of all Crane's villainy from beginning to end in it, and nothing more conclusive could be produced."

"Besides, madam," added Marie, "ze attorney mock zat I swear to ze evidence, vile I am een hees office."

The lady smiled and nodded.

"Good! And now I am ready!" she exclaimed.

Ruric left the room and went out in the yard.

"Such a series of events have followed my return from school!" he mused. "I never heard of anything like it before! Haunted by the image of my own mother—a helpless witness of a singular train of occurrences which I cannot understand, it is a wonder I am not crazy myself—maddened by all that has happened."

He saw the doctor returning, a few moments later, and not wishing to meet the yellow-eyed little rascal, he turned to enter the building when he saw a man dash at the doctor's buggy out in the road.

It was his father, and the moment Crane saw him he sprang out of the vehicle, leaving the driver in the seat, ran toward the asylum, and just as Ruric hurried in the main entrance the doctor followed, leaving the door standing wide open.

In ran the furious Godfrey Gruesome after him, the doctor slammed the door shut, and then, turning upon the returned sailor, he hissed, in sibilant tones:

"You have run into a trap, Godfrey Gruesome, for you will never leave this asylum again alive!"

CHAPTER XXI.

CONCLUSION.

Ruric had drawn aside from the two men, and stood at the foot of the staircase, and as the doctor finished speaking Crane raised a whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast.

It was a signal summoning the keepers.

"Father! Run for your life!" shouted the boy.

"Stand where you are!" roared Caleb Crane.

"No! You shall not murder me!" gasped Mr. Gruesome.

"This way—follow me!" cried Ruric.

There sounded the hurried patter of approaching footsteps, as the keepers came running through the hall.

Godfrey Gruesome saw Ruric dash up the stairs, beckoning to him, and the man hastened after him.

The moment Gruesome reached the upper hall he saw Ruric standing in front of his mother's room door, beckoning to him.

The door was thrown open the next moment, and the lady appeared upon the threshold.

"Ruric, what is the matter?" she cried upon beholding the boy.

"My father!" he panted, pointing at the man.

"Julia!" interpose Gruesome.

"Oh, Godfrey—my husband."

"I could not wait until three o'clock to come here——"

"Ah! What are those voices—those footsteps approaching——"

"The doctor and the keepers!" cried Ruric.

"They are pursuing me!" panted Gruesome.

"Come in here, then—quick!"

Just then Crane and the keepers appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Hold on! Don't let that man in your room!" Crane roared.

The two keepers made a dash at Gruesome.

But ere they had taken two steps, the lady caught hold of him, pulled him into the room, and as Ruric glided in after him the door was slammed shut in the enraged keepers' faces with a bang, the key was turned, the bolt shot into the socket, and they were barred out.

Bang! went Crane's fist against the panels.

"Open the door, or, by Jove, I'll burst it in!" he shouted. Godfrey Gruesome put his back against it.

"What shall I do?" he panted.

"Why didn't you stay away until I told you to come?" whispered his wife. "You may ruin my plans."

"I couldn't! I couldn't!" replied Gruesome.

"They may make a prisoner of you now."

"No! See, I am armed."

He drew a revolver from his pocket.

"No bloodshed here," remonstrated his wife.

"Not unless they drive me to it!" he replied, grimly.

But just then the sliding panel in the wall opened and the crazy-looking woman from cell No. 4 bounded into the room.

The doctor was the first to recover from his surprise.

"That woman has escaped again, by Jove!" he cried.

"Monster!" shrieked the crazy-looking creature, "you have gone back on me. But, thank heaven, I found a secret passage leading from that cell, and have managed to get out. Is this the way you treat me after all I have done for you? Is it? Is it? Is it?"

There was a dark look upon her face, and Ruric and his father now had ample opportunity of seeing what an exact image she was of the woman who figured as the doctor's wife.

Not only did she look like Mrs. Gruesome, but her voice and every gesture were exactly the same.

"Fool!" commenced the doctor.

"Caleb Crane," interposed Ruric's mother.

"Ah! you——"

"Do not deceive yourself any longer."

"What about?"

"About this woman and I."

"How do you mean, you traitress?"

"I am not your wife!"

"Not my wife?"

"No! I am Julia Gruesome——"

"Impossible."

"This woman is your real wife——"

"My wife?"

"She is Laura—my twin sister!"

"Great heaven!"

"She never died in Europe as you once gave out, but came here in concealment so that you could cheat me and my son out of the fortune left us by James Forrester—my father! I know all about your plot now!"

Godfrey Gruesome could only clutch Ruric's arm, and with a look as if he doubted the evidence of his senses stare from his wife to her sister and then at Crane.

The moment the disclosure came, so intent were they all with what was transpiring, they did not notice that the negro porter had admitted two men to the building and that they now stood in the doorway.

The two new arrivals heard all that passed, and were as much interested as the other spectators.

One was Benjamin H. Bings, and the other a stranger.

"To continue the deception," went on Mrs. Gruesome, in excited tones, "the physician was married to his own wife at the Irvingdale church, people imagining she was me. I was recaptured the same day and dosed with more of the diabolical medicine with which Caleb Crane hired Marie Montmedy to drug me. Confined in the dungeon cell, a raving maniac, I was helpless to undo the deception——"

"Then, when Dan—my father—at the cottage—declared his identity, as it was Laura Crane he spoke to, it was no wonder she did not recognize him," said Ruric.

"Exposed! All! Everything!" groaned the doctor.

"I now see why I imagined I was haunted!" cried Ruric.

"And I," said Godfrey Gruesome, "understand why I was deceived."

"A word from me, if you please," interrupted Laura Crane.

"Say what you will," said Ruric's mother, bitterly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself for your complicity in this work."

"True," said the woman, sadly. "I have been a wicked woman, and I am now heartily sorry for the part I took in this plot. I have been amply punished. But it was my wicked husband who induced me to do what I did."

"Fool! Fool! Shut up!" yelled Crane, glaring at her angrily.

"No, I won't! I have been your victim too long!" the poor creature retorted. "I was forced into it. Julia—my sister—for pity's sake forgive me! I am very, very repentant."

She fell upon her knees before Ruric's mother, with her clasped hands upraised supplicatingly, and tears streaming from her eyes.

"You have grossly wronged my husband, my son, and myself," said Ruric's mother, "but as you are repentant I freely forgive you, Laura, and hope you will profit by the lesson you have learned. Be a good woman in future and you will prosper."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" fervently cried the unhappy woman, rising to her feet. "You ever were good and kind, and I will follow your advice."

At this juncture Crane caught her by the arm.

"You must be mad!" he hissed. "We have not entirely lost

the game yet. We have got the three of them caged up in this house, by Jove, and I will call every one in the establishment to help me hold them here. I will not accept defeat. I am not yet baffled. Once I make prisoners of them I will finish this game, and—win!"

He sprang toward the door as he spoke, but the stranger accompanying Mr. Bings caught hold of him by the arm.

"Caleb Crane, you are my prisoner, in the name of the law!" he exclaimed, showing the startled doctor a detective's badge.

"Your prisoner?" stammered Crane, turning very pale.

"This lawyer has made the charge against you, in behalf of Mrs. Gruesome. We just overheard all that passed!"

Crushed at his defeat, Crane uttered a dismal groan.

"I am lost!" he gasped. "I throw up the sponge."

"And it is about time!" said the officer, as he snapped a pair of handcuffs on the man. "And as these two keepers are accomplices of yours, I'll haul them in, too!"

He soon had his three prisoners bunched.

"As hereinafter will appear," announced Mr. Bings, as he advanced into the room, "I discovered from Mrs. Gruesome's lawyer what an immense fraud has been going on, and with true judicial discretion have I secured this officer to arrest the guilty parties. It is true I arrived much earlier than aforesaid I would; still my call was very opportune. I have only to add that the fortune in question is ready for payment to the legal heirs; namely, to Mrs. Godfrey Gruesome, two-thirds; to her son Ruric, one-third, and a slight consideration to myself for my work. As the Latin has it, *sub colore juris*, or, in other words, under color of law, despite this vile plot, the proper parties shall receive their just dues! But how about the wife of the perfidious accused?"

"She shall go free; she has suffered enough," said Mrs. Gruesome. "She has made ample amends."

"Good! I am glad of it," said the lawyer, with a nod, "and at the same time I will hand this French lady a subpoena to appear at court to-morrow to give evidence against Caleb Crane. With her shorthand book, too, mind you, for that diary contains the sure conviction of this doctor. I will now bid you adieu!"

"Be merciful!" pleaded Crane, looking back.

"No! We will convict you!" said Godfrey Gruesome.

The detective then went away with his prisoners.

Then Ruric, his mother and father, and Marie bade Laura Crane good-by, and knowing that the doctor would leave her enough for her subsistence, they went away.

Taking up their quarters at an hotel, there they remained until they came in receipt of the fortune which had caused so much unhappiness, strife and intrigue.

Caleb Crane, Hank and Bill were tried for their offenses, the drug and the French woman's shorthand book, added to the evidence of all the parties interested sending them to jail.

Marie was paid by Mrs. Gruesome and went away to France.

The wife of the perfidious madhouse keeper disappeared from Irvingdale soon after, and the reunited husband and wife went to New York to take up their residence with Ruric, to escape the scene of their past misery.

No longer a haunted boy, since the madhouse mystery was solved, young Gruesome became a law student in one of the colleges, and soon after his graduation distinguished himself as an honor to his profession.

And so we must leave them—the innocent and just enjoying benefits of their fortitude and courage—the wicked and designing reaping the whirlwind of their iniquity at last.

Next week's issue will contain "NAT O' THE NIGHT: OR, THE BRAVEST IN THE REVOLUTION." By Gen'l Jas. A. Gordon.

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE.

SPECIAL NOTICE.—All back numbers of this weekly except the following are in print: 1 to 25, 27, 29 to 36, 38 to 40, 42, 43, 45 to 41, 53 to 55, 57 to 60, 62, 64 to 69, 71 to 73, 75, 79, 81, 84 to 86, 88, 89, 91 to 94, 98 to 100, 102, 105, 107, 109 to 111, 116, 119, 122, 124 to 126, 132, 139, 140, 143, 163, 166, 171, 179 to 181, 186, 192, 212, 213, 215, 216, 233, 239, 247, 257, 265, 268, 272, 277, 294. If you cannot obtain the ones you want from any newsdealer, send the price in money or postage stamps by mail to FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 168 West 23d Street, New York, and you will receive the copies you order by return mail.

A DEADLY BEDFELLOW.

By Col. Ralph Fenton.

One day a boy came running into our camp in a state of terrible excitement.

He said he had just seen two enormous snakes among the mimosas at the foot of the hill.

Harry and I seized some clubs and went out to the place designated, and while we were hunting the rest of our party joined us.

One of the dogs had got loose and followed us out.

He sprung forward with a leap; but when he found what kind of game it was, he evidently meant to haul off.

He had got a little too near, however, for his safety, for before he could draw off a serpent sprung and bit him.

The poor brute shrunk away with a sharp cry, and almost instantly went into convulsions, and in less than five minutes he was dead.

In a little while we despatched the venomous monster and cut off his head; and for several hours thereafter the green poison continued to ooze, in small drops, from the sharp fangs.

The snake was called by the natives the picakholu, and pronounced, without any exception, the most venomous of all the serpent tribe.

So copious is its poison that six strong oxen have been known to die from its bites at a single attack.

The first animal bitten died almost instantly, the second died in a very few minutes, the third lived half an hour, while the others lingered longer.

The snake we had slain measured nine feet and two inches in length, and was six inches in diameter at the largest part of the body.

The color of the back was a dark, dirty brown, changing to a yellowish tinge upon the belly.

I might have preserved the skin; but after the exhibition I had witnessed of the terrible power of the poison which distilled from those fangs, I am willing to confess that I had no desire to take the head into my hands. We returned to our camp.

We looked over the camp to see that all was safe and right, and then retired.

I was just closing my eyes and composing myself for sleep, when I fancied that I heard something moving close by me.

Was it Harry?

I spoke to him, but found him fast asleep.

I listened awhile, and hearing nothing more, I lay down again.

I had slept, how long I knew not, when I was aroused by a cold touch upon my forehead.

I started up and placed my hand upon my brow.

It was so dark that I could see nothing, save the opening at the entrance of the hut.

I spoke to Harry again, but he did not answer me.

He was sleeping soundly as ever.

It must have been a dream, I thought.

The icy touch upon my forehead must have been all fancy.

I had no remembrance of what I had dreamed; there was a cold sweat upon my brow, and my heart was oppressed as though by an incubus.

I remained awhile in a sitting posture, and then lay down again.

Again I slept, but not soundly.

A horrible dream came to trouble me.

I dreamed that I was in the deep forest all alone, without my horse, and without weapons of any kind.

How I came there I knew not.

I was weak and faint, as though I had been very sick, and as I sat up and looked around I found that a flood of waters was arising upon all hands.

There was no current—no rushing of the water; but silent and darkly it arose, until the place of my rest had become an island.

Then the island grew smaller and smaller as the deep, black water, arose, until the flood almost touched my feet.

Then there came up from the inky depths a score of huge serpents, with their heads all pointing toward me.

They were picakholus!

Their white fangs had a murderous gleam, and I could see the deadly poison distilling therefrom.

One of them crawled up and rested his head upon my knees.

I cried out in terror, and awoke.

My cry startled Harry from his sleep, and he asked me what was the matter.

As soon as I could collect my scattered senses I answered him.

I told him that the snake we had killed had filled my sleep with horrible dreams.

He laughed and lay down again, and pretty soon I followed his example, and once more I slept.

When I was next aroused it was not by a dream.

I distinctly felt something moving upon my legs—a cold, oppressive weight, which thrilled me with an electric force.

During the latter part of the night I had been sleeping in a half-sitting posture, the end of my mattress being folded under my pillow, so that, as I awoke, I was able to look around without lifting my head.

Daylight was in the hut, and Harry's bed was empty.

He had arisen and gone out.

Perhaps he had stepped upon me as he passed.

No, the weight was still upon me.

"Oh, heaven!"

The words broke from my lips in a shrieking whisper, and for a moment I was utterly paralyzed.

Upon the blanket, and resting directly over my legs, lay a monstrous picakholu.

He was in a coil, and his head was erect, reaching up half a yard, and swaying to and fro with a slightly undulating motion.

His eyes were like two globes of fire, and ever and anon he darted out his forked tongue as he caught the gleam of my eye.

I at once comprehended that this must be the mate to the serpent we had slain on the previous day.

This monster had tracked his companion to our camp, and had found shelter in my hut.

My situation was at that moment terrible beyond description.

The serpent lay so that his head vibrated just above my knees, and with a movement like a flash of light he could have stricken his fangs into my flesh.

I could hear the voices of my companions without, but I dared not call to them.

My speech might startle the serpent to bite me, and if those fangs touched me, how long could I live?

My pistols were beneath my pillow, but I dared not reach for them.

I could see by the position of the serpent, and by the motions of his head, that he was ready to strike me; all he waited for was some sign, on my part, of life—something to give direction to his stroke.

I still heard my companions conversing not far away; but I could expect no help from them for some time yet.

I was becoming weak and full of pain.

The sustaining of my body in that one position, so utterly still, had become torture.

My eyes seemed to be bursting, my temples throbbed, and my heart beat until its pulsations almost choked me.

And still the serpent changed not his place.

His head maintained the same elevation, and he only waited for me to show some sign of life.

Presently I heard the dogs.

They had been let loose, and two of them were close by my hut.

Should I call them?

It was my only hope.

As carefully as possible I pursed up my lips, and gave a low whistle.

The snake raised his head higher, and darted out his tongue.

Without changing the position of my lips, I whistled again.

The dogs had heard me, and two of them came leaping into the hut.

They saw the snake, and leaped toward it.

The monster turned his attention upon the dogs, and I waited for no more.

With one bound I left my bed and reached the side of the hut—another bound took me into the open air, where I sunk down, completely overcome.

I was not like one exhausted by excessive labor; but I was blind and dizzy, and oppressed for breath.

I managed to make my companions understand what the dogs had found, but I could do no more.

When I recovered I found the serpent dead, and the two dogs also dead.

The loss of the dogs was a serious affair; but at that particular time, and under the particular circumstances of the occasion, I did not mourn for them as I otherwise might have done.

This second picakholu measured eight feet and ten inches in length, being some inches shorter than the first; but he was long enough, and I felt that I had seen a sufficiency of that kind of game.

It was several days before I entirely recovered from the shock; and for many weeks afterward that deadly monster haunted me in my dreams.

STRANGE LAKES OF MICHIGAN.

Five thousand lakes of all sizes is the proud total claimed by the State of Michigan. Some of them are mysterious bodies having neither inlet nor outlet, nor, so far as can be discovered by sounding, bottom.

Many of the smaller lakes are slowly growing over and have wide margins of tough sod that will support the weight of a man, although merely resting on water or a thin mud of unknown depth.

These margins tremble to the tread and quiver for many feet around when stepped on. There are instances where a lake has become entirely overgrown and for so long a period that the surface becomes solid and the existence of water underneath is unsuspected.

The Pere Marquette Railroad Company when building a branch between Grand Rapids and Lansing returned to the work one morning to find that several rods of road-bed had disappeared during the night and a considerable lake had taken its place. Thousands of feet of timber and many carloads of earth were dumped in before bottom was found and the road had anything like a firm foundation. The pressure of the displaced water heaved the earth and cracked it for some distance around, tilting large forest trees, some of which fell.

Water came up through these crevices, bringing eyeless fish, both bass and bull-heads, convincing certain former sceptics that when any organ of sense or locomotion falls into disuse it degenerates and finally is lost. Probably these fish were the descendants of others that had lived in darkness for ages.

A small lake in Bowne township, supposed by the rural folk to be bottomless, swallowed up a full half acre at one gulp a few years ago, and where the slide took place the water is apparently as deep as ever.

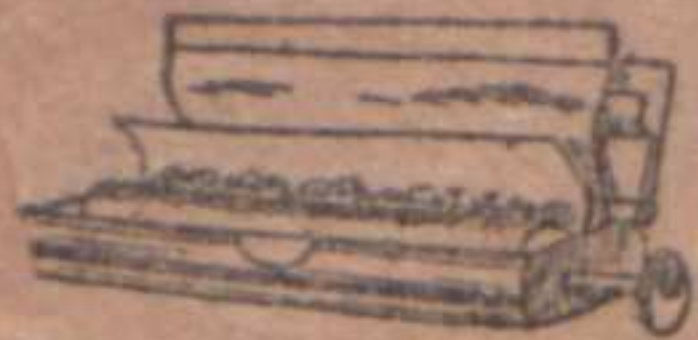
In the extreme western edge of Ionia county there is a little lake of about three acres in area; it is without any visible feeders or outlet. It is surrounded by woods on the high land, while its margin is grown up to shrubs and flags and grasses peculiar to the ordinary swamp.

This is another of those mysterious water holes, termed bottomless, one party having sounded 150 feet without finding bottom. The water is red and unfit to drink and millions of minute particles of vegetable matter are held in suspension and are in commotion as if stirred by force of an undercurrent or boiling springs.

The only fish are big-mouthed bass and bullheads. For all that the water seems to be so swampy in character it does not detract from the flavor of the fish, probably owing to the fact of its being of better quality in its lower depths.

Nagley's Lake, in Kent county, is formed like a great horseshoe and is about seven miles in circumference. It has been sounded in one place and showed a depth of 250 feet. It has but one insignificant feeder and the natural evaporation must be considerable, and yet it has an outlet which flows water sufficient for power to drive a sawmill and gristmill, proving that it is fed by heavy flowing springs that man has never seen. The water is clear blue and cold, and the bottom is hard marl lime.

RAPID CIGARETTE MAKER.



This little article should be in the pocket of every smoker. With it a perfect cigarette can be made in ten seconds. You will find them equal in appearance and far superior in quality to commercial ones, at less than a quarter of the cost. With our cigarette maker in your possession, you can smoke a pipe or cigarette at pleasure, as it's just as easy to roll a cigarette as to fill a pipe. Every part of the cigarette maker is handsomely nickel-plated. Price, 15c., or 3 for 40c. by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

ITCH POWDER.



Gee whiz! What fun you can have with this stuff. Moisten the tip of your finger, tap it on the contents of the box, and a little bit will stick. Then shake hands with your friend, or drop a speck down his back. In a minute he will feel as if he had the seven years' itch. It will make him scratch, roar, squirm and make faces. But it is perfectly harmless, as it is made from the seeds of wild roses. The horrible itch stops in a few minutes, or can be checked immediately by rubbing the spot with a wet cloth. While it is working, you will be apt to laugh your suspender buttons off. The best joke of all. Price 10 cents a box, by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

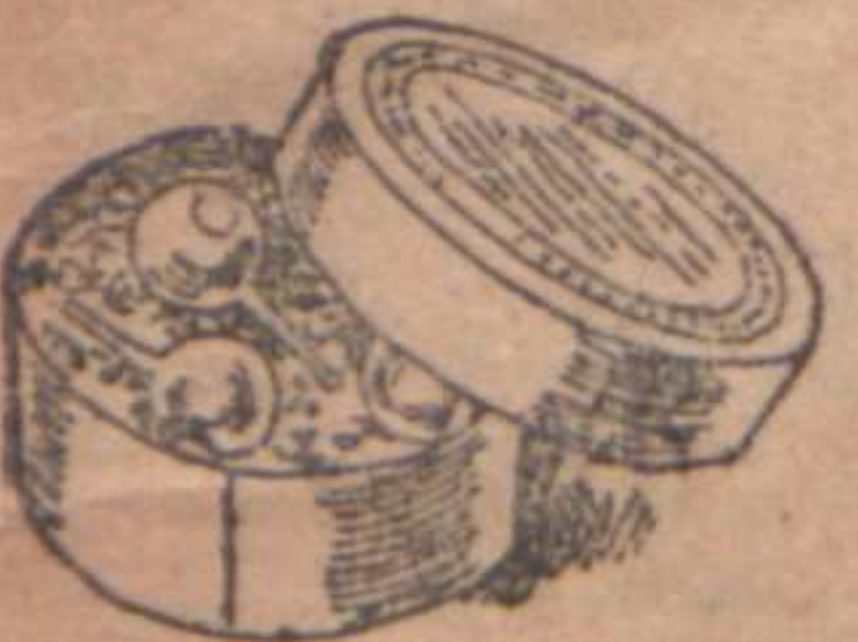
"RUBBER-NECK" PHONOGRAPH.



The "Rubber-Neck" Phonograph consists of a little red paste-board box, to the inside of which is attached a celluloid strip bearing the record. A little key is held in the left hand and drawn quickly over the celluloid strip. The result is surprising. Just as plain and clear as the human voice comes forth the words "rubber-neck."

Price, 10c. each by mail postpaid. H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.

ANARCHIST BOMBS.



They are small glass vials, and contain a liquid chemical that produces a horrible odor. When dropped in a room, they will make every person present rush out, holding their noses. In a few minutes the smell will disappear. Perfectly harmless. No danger of any evil effect. The only risk is that your friends may make you smell one of the bombs you, ah, if they catch you. Price, 10c. a box, or 3 for 25c., by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

GOOD LUCK BANKS.



Ornamental as well as useful. Made of highly nickel-plated brass. It holds just One Dollar. When filled it opens itself. Remains locked until refilled. Can be used as a watchcharm. Money refunded if not satisfied. Price, 10c. by mail.

L. SENARENS, 347 Winthrop St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

CACHOO OR SNEEZING POWDER.



The greatest fun-maker of them all. A small amount of this powder, when blown in a room, will cause everyone to sneeze without anyone knowing where it comes from. It is very light, will float in the air for some time, and penetrate every nook and corner of a room. It is perfectly harmless. Cachoo is put up in bottles, and one bottle contains enough to be used from 10 to 15 times. Price, by mail, 10c. each; 3 for 25c.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

MYSTIC PUZZLE



The newest and most novel puzzle on the market. It consists of a flat piece of wood 1 1/2 x 3 inches, neatly covered with imitation leather. The cross-bar and ring in the hole are nickel-plated. The object is to get the small ring off the bar. It absolutely cannot be done by anyone not in the secret. More fun to be had with it than with any other puzzle made. It is not breakable and can be carried in the vest pocket.

Price 10 cents each by mail, post-paid. H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.



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PARKER, STEARNS & CO., 273 GEORGIA AVE., BROOKLYN, N. Y.



WEIRD & NOBBY 15c

This Skull & Crossbones Ring. Oxidized silver finish; flashing red or green eyes. Looks well, wears well and pleases. Draws attention everywhere. Price only 15c or 3 for 25c; worth more. Wholesale: 12 for \$1.00. Big sales. W. E. HILLPOT, Frenchtown, N. J.

LOTS OF FUN FOR A DIME

Ventriloquists Double Throat. Plus roof of mouth; always invisible; greatest thing yet. Astonish and mystify your friends. Neigh like a horse; whine like a puppy; sing like a canary and imitate birds and beasts of field and forest. LOADS OF FUN. Wonderful invention. Thousands sold. Price only 10 cents; 4 for 25 cents or 12 for 50 cents. DOUBLE THROAT CO. DEPT. Y FRENCHTOWN, N. J.

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25c Takes pictures 1 1/4 x 1 1/4. A little goes a long way. Leatherette covered camera and complete outfit of plates, paper, chemicals, etc. with complete instructions so any boy or girl can take GOOD PICTURES of landscapes, buildings, friends, etc. All sent for only 25c actually or 3 for 50c.

Camera Supply Co., Dept. A, Frenchtown, N. J.

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GREENBACKS Pack of \$1,000 Stage Bill

and present, 10c; 3 packs, 25c. Send for a pack and show the boys what a WAD you carry. C. A. Nichols, Jr., Box 90, Chili, New York

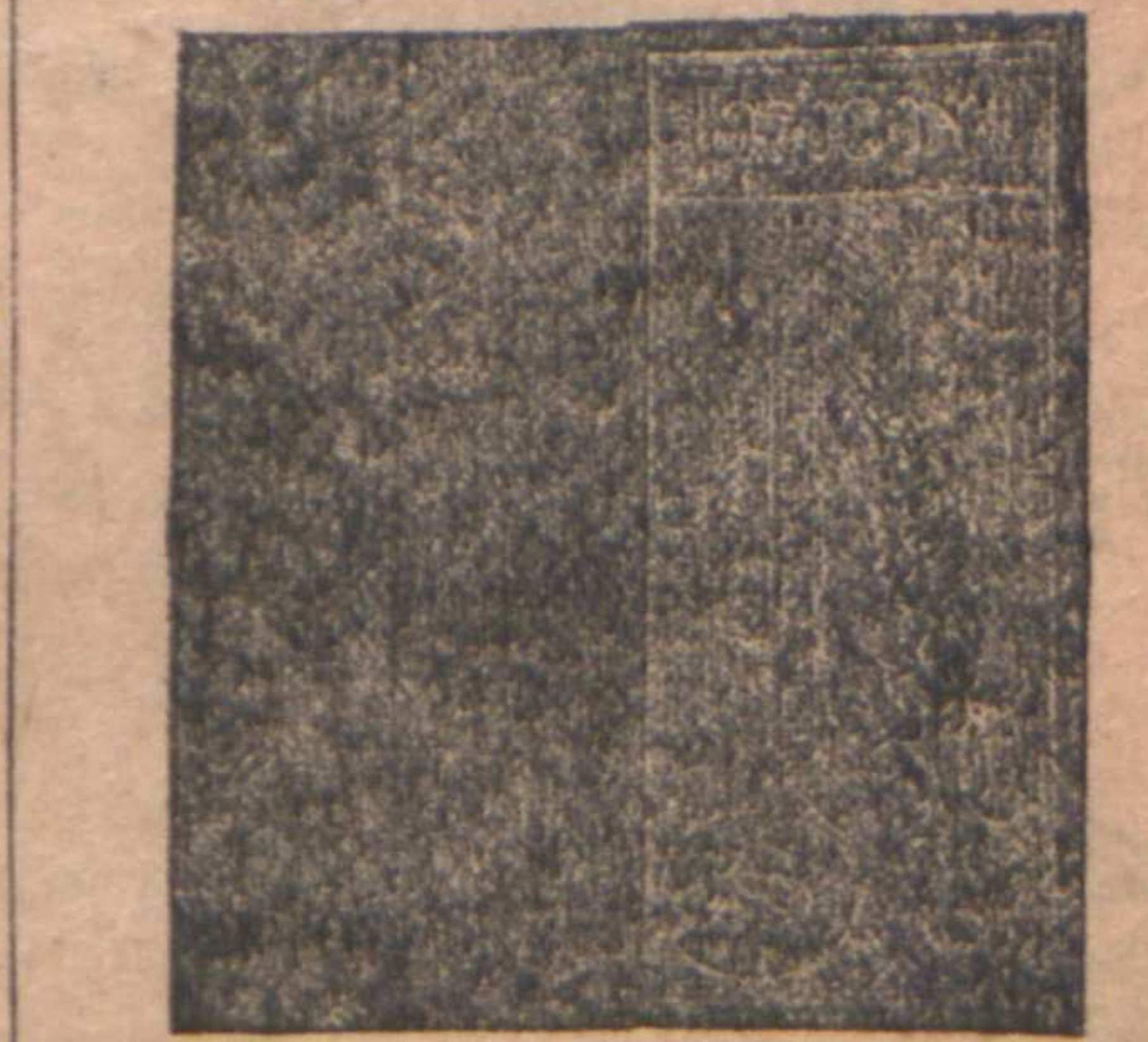
EVERY BOY HIS OWN TOY MAKER



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C. F. Clarke & Co., Box 504, Le Roy, N. Y.

THE MAGIC WALLET



Lots of fun can be had with it puzzling people, while being used in a practical way to carry bank bills, letters, invoices, etc. Open with the straight bands on the left, lay a bill on top of bands, close wallet; open to the left and the bill will be found under the crossed bands. Close wallet, open to the right and the bill will be found under straight bands. How did it get there? That's the question. Price 12 cts. each, postpaid.

J. KENNEDY, 303 West 127th St., N. Y.

FIFFL



My six inches wide.

M. O'NEILL, 425 W. 56th St., N. Y.

Also known as a Japanese butterfly. A pleasing novelty enclosed in an envelope. When the envelope is opened Fiff will fly out through the air for several yards. Made of colored paper to represent a butterfly. Price, 10c.

VANISHING CIGAR.



This cigar is made in exact imitation of a good one. It is held by a rubber cord which, with the attached safety pin, is fastened on the inside of the sleeve. When offered to a friend, as it is about to be taken, it will instantly disappear.

Price, 10c. each by mail, postpaid. H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.

JAPANESE TWIRLER.



A wonderful imported paper novelty. By a simple manipulation of the wooden handles a number of beautiful figures can be produced. It takes on several combinations of magnificent colors. Price, 10c., postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

SPRING TOPS



Something new for the boys. A top you can spin without a string. This is a decided novelty. It is of large size, made of brass, and has a heavy balance rim. The shank contains a powerful spring and has an outer casing. The top of the shank has a milled edge for winding it up. When wound, you merely lift the outer casing, and the top spins at such a rapid speed that the balance rim keeps it going a long time. Without doubt the handsomest and best top on the market.

Price 12 cents each, by mail, post-paid. H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.

LITTLE ACCORDEONS



The smallest, cheapest, and best sounding musical instrument for the price. This perfect little accordion has four keys and eight notes, a complete scale, upon which you can play almost any tune. It is about 5 x 2 1/2 inches in size, and is not a toy, but a practical and serviceable accordion in every respect; with ordinary care it will last for years, and produces sweet music and perfect harmony. Anyone can learn to play it with very little practice.

Price 12 cents each, by mail, post-paid. WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

TABLE RAISING TRICK



The most mystifying trick ever done by a magician. The performer shows a plain light table. He places his hand flat upon its top. The table clings to his hand as if glued there. He may swing it in the air, but the table will not leave his hand until he sets it on the floor again. The table can be inspected to show that there are no strings or wires attached.

Price 13 cents each, by mail, post-paid. M. O'NEILL, 425 W. 56th St., N. Y.

MUSICAL SEAT



The best joke out. You can have more fun than a circus, with one of these novelties. All you have to do is to place one on a chair seat (hidden under a cushion, if possible). Then tell your friend to sit down. An unearthly shriek from the little round drum will send your victim up in the air, the most puzzled and astonished mortal on earth. Don't miss getting one of these genuine laugh producers. Perfectly harmless, and never misses doing its work.

Price 20 cents each, by mail, post-paid. WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

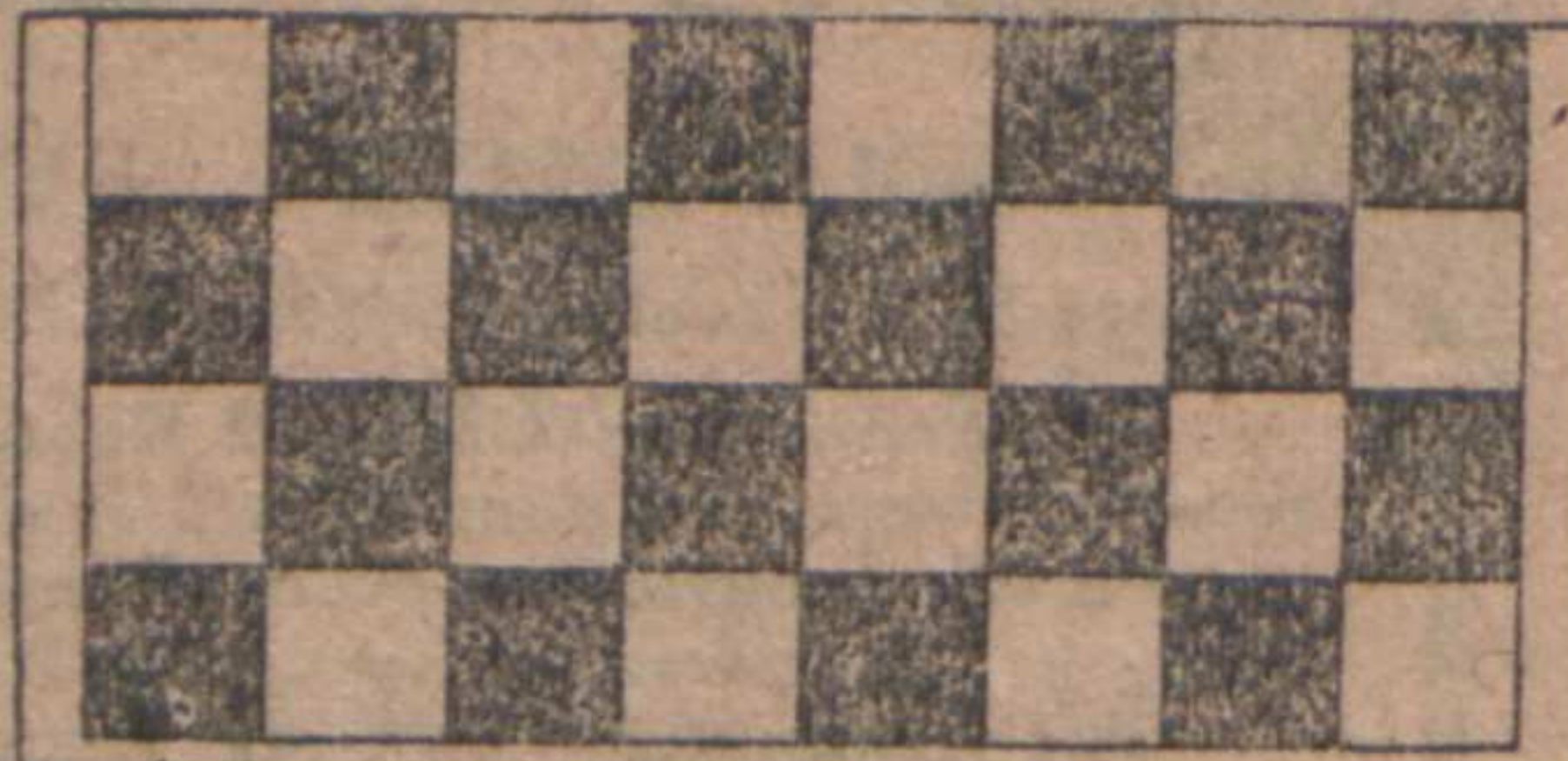
HUMANATONE.



The improved Humanatone. This flute will be found to be the most enjoyable article ever offered; nickel plated, finely polished; each put up in a box with full instruction how to use them. Price, 18c., postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St. N. Y.

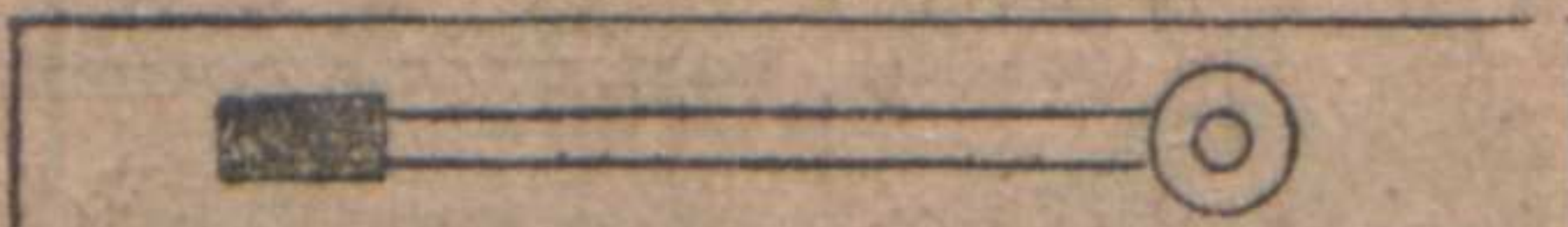
LITTLE CHECKER BOARDS.



Price 7 cents each by mail. They are made of durable colored cardboard, fold to the size of 6 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches, and are so handy in size that they can be carried in the pocket. They contain 24 red and black checkers, and are just as serviceable as the most expensive boards made. The box and lid can be fastened together in a moment by means of patent joints in the ends. Full directions printed on each box.

H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.

DOUBLE CLAPPERS



They are handsomely made of white wood, 8 inches long, with carefully rounded edges. On each side a steel spring is secured, with flat leaden discs at the ends. They produce a tremendous clatter, and yet they can be played even better than the most expensive bones used by minstrels. The finest article of its kind on the market. Price 7 cents a pair, postpaid.

M. O'NEILL, 425 W. 56th St., N. Y.

THE BOO-BOO CARD



Here is an innocent, and very laughable practical joke. It consists of a card, postal size, blackened on one side, except a white circle in the center. On the other is an interesting sentence, printed in spiral form, so that one has to keep turning the card around and around in order to read it. The turning of the card causes the dark side to blacken the reader's fingers.

Price 10 cents each by mail, postpaid. J. KENNEDY, 303 West 127th St., N. Y.

LIGHTNING TRICK BOX.



A startling and pleasing illusion! "The ways of the world are devious," says Matthew Arnold, but the ways of the Lightning Trick Box when properly handled are admitted to be puzzling and uncertain. You take off the lid and show your friends that it is full of nice candy. Replace the lid, when you can solemnly assure your friends that you can instantly empty the box in their presence without opening it; and taking off the lid again, sure enough the candy has disappeared. Or you can change the candy into a piece of money by following the directions sent with each box. This is the neatest and best cheap trick ever invented.

Price, only 10c.; 3 for 25c., mailed, postpaid. M. O'NEILL, 425 W. 56th St., N. Y.

CARTER AEROPLANE No. 1.



Will fly on a horizontal line 150 feet! Can be flown in the house, and will not injure itself nor anything in the room. The most perfect little aeroplane made. The motive power is furnished by twisted rubber bands contained within the tubular body of the machine. It is actuated by a propeller at each end revolving in opposite directions. Variation in height may be obtained by moving the planes and the balance weight. It can be made to fly either to the right or the left by moving the balance side-wise before it is released for flight. Price, 35c. each, delivered.

L. Senarens, 347 Winthrop St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

LITTLE RIP'S TEN-PINS.



In each set there are ten pins and two bowling balls, packed in a beautifully ornamented box. With one of these miniature sets you can play ten-pins on your dining-room table just as well as the game can be played in a regular alley. Every game known to professional bowlers can be worked with these pins. Price, 10c. per box by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.

FIGHTERS.



A brand new idea for amusement. They consist of small cardboard figures of soldiers, Indians, swordsmen, etc., and are mounted on wires. The moment you twist the wires between the little figures, they instantly become animated, and charge at each other in the most astonishing manner. No end of fun with these toys. Price, 5c. by mail, postpaid.

WOLFF NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

THE FLUTTER-BY.



This mechanical flying machine is worked by a new principle. It looks like a beautiful butterfly, about 9 inches wide. In action its wing movements are exactly like those of a live butterfly. It will travel through the air about 25 feet, in the most natural manner. As flying toys are all the rage, this one should be a source of profit and amusement to both old and young. Price, 13c. each by mail, postpaid.

H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.

BUBBLE BLOWER.



With this device, a continuous series of bubbles can be blown. It is a wooden, cigar-shaped blower, enclosing a small vial, in which there is a piece of soap. The vial is filled with water, and a peculiarly perforated cork is inserted. When you blow in to the mouthpiece, it sets up a hydraulic pressure through the cork perforations and causes bubble after bubble to come out. No need of dipping into water once the little bottle is filled. Price, 10c. each by mail, postpaid.

J. KENNEDY, 303 W. 127th St., N. Y.

HALF MASKS.



False-faces beaten a mile! There are 7 in a set and represent an Indian, a Japanese girl, a clown, Foxy Grandpa, an English Johnny Atkins and an Automobillist. Beautifully lithographed in handsome colors on a durable quality of cardboard. They have eyeholes and string perforations. Price, 6c. each, or the full set of 7 for 25c., postpaid.

M. O'NEILL, 425 W. 56th St., N. Y.

THE NEW FROG JOKER.



Bushels of fun! "Froggy" has got a very croaking and rasping voice, and when held in the hollow of the hand and made to croak, one instinctively looks around for a bullfrog. An amusing joke can be played on your friends by passing the ratchet-wheel of the frog down their coat-sleeve or the back of their coat. The ripping, tearing noise gives them a severe shock, and they heave a sigh of relief when they find that their clothes are sound and whole as before. A good joke is to make a gentleman's or lady's watch a stem winder. With the frog concealed in your hand, you take the stem of the watch between your thumb and finger, and at the same time allow the ball of your thumb to pass over the ratchet-wheel of the frog, when to the company you will seem to be winding the watch, but the noise will startle them, for 'twill sound more like winding Harum's steam callope than a watch, and you can keep winding indefinitely. The possessor of one of these Frog Jokers can have any amount of fun with it. It is made of bronze metal and will never wear out. Do not fail to send for one. Price, 10c., 3 for 25c. by mail, postpaid; one dozen by express, 15c.

H. F. LANG, 215 Walworth St., B'klyn., N. Y.

PLUCK AND LUCK

NEW YORK, MAY 8, 1912.

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BRIEF, BUT POINTED.

An innovation in Boston school work has been planned in the establishment of classes for stammerers in the Julia Ward Howe schoolhouse, Roxbury, to begin Monday morning, April 18. The sessions will be from 10 to 12 o'clock in the afternoon. The classes will be held on each school day for the following two weeks.

A party of tourists which recently travelled over the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada continuously for five days was served during that time, on the dining-cars, with 60 meals daily or 3,300 meals in all. This was done on standard dining-cars, each having a seating capacity of 60 persons and managed by one conductor, four cooks and five waiters. At this rate each waiter served at each meal an average of 22 persons, and each chair would be used an average of three and two-thirds times at each meal.

Eight delegates from the Wisconsin Methodist Episcopal conference will go to the general church conference at Minneapolis May 1. This conference will be made up of delegates from the Methodist churches all over the world. Matters of much importance will be discussed and acted upon at the meeting. Several revolutionary ideas will be introduced, among them one recommending the annulling of the rules against dancing and card playing. This measure has the support of the younger and progressive element in the conference.

It has long been noticed that prehistoric skulls have teeth worn in a manner that was difficult to explain. At the Academy of Sciences in Paris a few days ago Marcel Baudouin gave what seems a rational explanation. The scientist said he had sought out what animals had teeth worn in this peculiar manner. The only cue he could find was the pig. Now, our ancestors must have eaten roots as well as the flesh of animals and they doubtless were not very particular about washing them, so the earth upon them ground down their molars as it does that of the pig. M. Baudouin also suggested that these primeval men may have had the same vice that certain Oriental people have—that of devouring earth habitually.

A very interesting and remarkable discovery of illuminated manuscripts and early printed books, ranging as far back as 1480, has just been made in the library at Oxton Hall, England. It came about in this way. The vicar of the parish, the Rev. W. Laycock, obtained permission to go through the books in the library at his leisure. While so doing his curiosity was aroused by a locked and forgotten cupboard therein, which he proceeded to investigate. Its contents proved to be between forty and fifty volumes, which confirmed the impression conveyed by the antiquity of their appearance that they belonged to the very earliest stage of the art of printing, which was introduced into this country in 1474. The majority of them are folio volumes, and with one exception they are all in their original bindings. The covers are carefully planed boards of solid oak, and the books are bound with stout leather laces, the backing and lining being fragments of illuminated manuscripts of a much earlier date, cut up as waste with a ruthless indifference.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

"Is fishing good at this resort?" "Sure, one of the girls catches a sucker every day."

Willis—I wonder if there will ever be universal peace?
Gillis—Sure. All they've got to do is to get the nations to agree that in case of war the winner pays the pensions.

She—I'm afraid, Tom, dear, you will find me a mine of faults. He—Darling, it shall be the sweetest labor of my life to correct them. She (flaring up)—Indeed, you shan't.

"There's nothing slow about Jones." "I guess you never loaned him money." "Oh, yes, I have. I loaned him \$10 six months ago, and I haven't been able to catch him since."

Business man (explaining)—When they say "money is easy" they mean simply that the supply is greater than the demand. His Wife—Goodness! I shouldn't think such a thing possible.

Citizen—What's up? Policeman—Oi'm knockin' fur help, an' ringin' fur an ambulance. Citizen—What's the matter? Policeman—Oi just saw two Oytalians smilin' at th' same woman.

Uncle Jackson (showing city boy the farm)—With all your city eddication, sonny, I'll warrant you don't know which side you milk the cow from? The Boy—Sure, I do! It's the under side!

"Maggie," said the mistress to the new girl, "don't you know better than to throw the slops out at the back door?" "Axin' ver pardon, ma'am," replied Maggie, "but I reckon as I knows me bizness. I ain't never worked fer a fambly wot had no more self-respect than t' throw 'em out at the front door, ma'am."

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- 333 Driven from School; or, The Pirate's Buried Gold.
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335 Telegraph Tom; or, The Message That Made Him Famous.
336 Dick and the Mad Broker; or, The Secret Band of Wall Street.
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338 Tom Swift of Wall Street; or, The Boy Who Was on the Job.

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